

# HISTORY

B.80712  
Ypr. Holt-Ross



OF

THE 11th CANADIAN ARMoured REGIMENT  
(THE ONTARIO REGIMENT)

IN THE FIELD

1939 - 1945

# THE CAT LIVES ON!

This Supplemen to the "CAT" is published by permission of Lieut.-Col. C. M. McLean.

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The most gratifying aspect of the publication has been the pleasure and inspiration derived from the whole-hearted co-operation of certain members of the Regiment.

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Finally on behalf of the Regiment, we thank the Flevo Press of Harlingen for their very generous contribution.

J E. S.

# HONOUR ROLL

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B-68012	Cpl. MAY, F. W.	A-58442	Tpr. LURAAS, O. A.
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C-5245	Tpr. ASHBY, B. E.	B-60606	Tpr. SPENCELY, M. R.
L-54919	Tpr. BOHONIS, K.	M-63907	Tpr. STEWART, J. M.
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# THE ONTARIO REGIMENT

## IN THE FIELD

1939 - 1945

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper is not intended as a definite history of the regiment in the war of 1939-45. It is an attempt to preserve, for any future historian, as much as can be gathered from those who were present of the experiences of the regiment in the field. It is believed that there is enough interest in such a collation to warrant its being written up in consecutive form and being printed.

The Ontario Regiment was founded as a volunteer Highland Rifle Company in 1857. Five years later it was merged, as a company, into the Queen's Own Rifles, Toronto. This company later became part of the 134th Regt., gazetted in 1886. Representatives served at the Battle of Ridgeway in 1886, Northwest Rebellion in 1885, and in the South African War, 1899-1901.

In the Great War (1914-1918) recruited 116 and 182 Bns. The former left Canada in June, 1916 and arrived in France in Feb. 1917. It was attached to the 9th Bde.

The regimental battle honours in the Great War include - "Somme 1916" "Arras 1917 - 1918", "Vimy 1917", "Hill 70", "Ypres 1917" "Passchendaele", "Amiens," "Scarte 1918," "Drocourt-Queant," "Hindenburg Line," "Canal du Nord," "Cambrai 1918," "Valenciennes" "France and Flanders 1916-18".

The present Regt., with HQ in Oshawa, Ont., perpetuates the 116th and 182nd Bns., CEF. Its colours are light blue, dark blue and gold, and its motto is "Fidelis et Paratus". The colours are

deposited in St. George's Church, Oshawa. The regiment is allied with the Welch Regt.

In the present war, the regt. was mobilized on 4 Sept. 1939. It did guard duty in Canada at Espinola and Monteith, escorting and guarding German POWs.

In June 41 after a period of training at Camp Borden where it was incorporated into 1 Cdn. Army Tank Bde the regt. sailed from Halifax on the French liner "Pasteur." It landed at Greenock 1 July 41, proceeding immediately to Lavington. After a period of training, the regt. moved to Headley, Surrey on 15 Sept. 41, part of the unit going for a few weeks to Linney Head, South Wales to shoot on the AFV range.

The regt. became the first Canadian unit to be equipped with Churchills, 7 July 41, and, in the exercises of 1941-42, worked with this tank in its experimental period.

On 21 Dec. 41, the Regt. moved to Brighton, where it remained for the winter. On 26 April, it moved to Shermanbury Park, near Brighton, and on 3 Aug. 42 returned to Brighton. During this period, the regiment had various operational roles in the defense of the South Coast.

On Nov. 17, the regt. moved to Seaford. In Jan., combined ops trg was carried out at Poole. On 25 Feb., the regt. moved to Worthing, where the whole Bde. was concentrated. On 1st March, exercise Spartan commenced,



## INTRODUCTION

taking the regt. North almost to Buckingham.

In April, the regt. lost its Churchills, and was re-equipped with Rams. It then moved to the AFV range at Minehead, leaving a rear party in Worthing.

On 27 April, a warning order was received by the rear party to prepare to move to Scotland to do combined ops trg with 1, 2 and 3 Inf. Divs. All Rams were to be left behind, and Shermans would be received on arrival in Scotland.

All ordnance stores were left in Worthing with rear parties, Offrs' trunks and surplus kitbags of ORs were left behind, and recce and advance parties were sent ahead.

On 8 May, 3 trains took the personnel from Worthing station. The wheels travelled in convoy with the 5-Chrysler engine Sherman, armed with a 75-mm gun. Classes in gunnery and D and M on the new vehicles were started on 12 May with instructors from Bovington and Lulworth. New trucks were also received, and Ford Scout cars were issued in place of the Daimlers formerly held.

On 19 May, the tanks moved to the AFV range at Kirkcudbright, on the west coast, and on 20 May, firing commenced. A very intensive program, involving firing from 0500 until 1900 was laid on. On 25 May, the regt. returned to Stobs, and waterproofing began on 26 May.

On 2 June the I. O. and 1 Cpl. went to London, where, with other I. personnel of the Bde., they prepared and collated all available material on the terrain and defenses of Sicily, the area where the regt. was to fight.

On 8 June a demonstration was put on a set-piece attack, for all officers of the tanks and infantry.

On 12 June, 43, 8 tanks left by rail for Newport, South Wales to be loaded on a cargo ship.

On 17, 18 and 19 June, the main tank move took place. Tanks were loaded on warflats at a railway siding near Stobs Camp, and shipped to Wemyss Bay by rail. On 20 June, all remaining personnel proceeded to Estate Camp, Inverkip by rail, and the wheels proceeded to the marshalling area near Wemyss Bay. Vehicles were marshalled in the order in which they were to load, with ship no. and no. of priority of unloading marked on them.

On 21 June, "A" and "C" sqns loaded on LSTs from prepared hards on the beach at Wemyss Bay. RHQ and "B" sqn loaded on 22 June. The regt. was carried on three LSTs, each craft taking a sqn of tanks, plus additional tanks, S-Cs and carriers below decks, and vehs to supply a sqn on an assault scale on the upper deck. Other vehs and 6 tanks were loaded on cargo ships which sailed with the LST convoy, and personnel travelled on the "Cameronia", which sailed sometime later. In addition, a number of vehs were shut out of the initial move altogether, and never reached the regt. until early October, when it was on the Foggia Plain.

Each LST had on board 2 sets of ship bags. One had a green label, and was to be opened when out of sight of land. The other had a red label, and was to be opened only on receipt of a signal from higher authority.

The regt. was commanded by Lt.-Col. M. P. Johnston, with Maj. R. B. Kerr, Maj. D. H. Lander, Maj. H. E. Irwin and Maj. J. T. F. Orr, commanding sqns. Each sqn consisted of 5 troops of 3 Shermans each, all armed with 75-mm guns. In addition, there was a recce troop of 11 Universal Carriers. Nine Scout Cars were used for intercom.

All vehs were camouflaged in light colours, to blend with the browns and yellows of the Mediterranean area in the summer. All had R. A. F. roundels painted prominently on the top to ensure recognition by friendly aircraft. Every vehicle was waterproofed to wade to a depth of 6 ft.



## 11 - SICILY

After lying in the Clyde for several days, the LSTs sailed. In the same convoy were craft carrying the 14th Regt. and Bde. HQ. The green ships bags were opened on this date. In them was found general material on the Italian army and on Italy. On leaving the Clyde, the LSTs were joined by cargo ships from other ports which were travelling in the same convoy.

The convoy rounded the Northern tip of Ireland, and sailed South within sight of the Irish Coast for some time. It then swung well out, and travelled in fine weather, which grew warmer each day. On 5 July, land was sighted again, and the convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, passing Gibraltar itself after dark.

The convoy now skirted the North coast of Africa for several days. The corvettes which had escorted it from Scotland to Gibraltar were replaced by more heavily armed and faster escort craft.

On 10 July 43, word was received that Sicily had been invaded. A message to all troops was read on the ships. On 11 July, the signal was received to open the red label bags. In these were found detailed material on Sicily. Maps of Sicily were opened and distributed. Orders were to proceed to Malta, there to await a call to land as needed in Sicily.

Malta was sighted on 12 July, but before the ships could put in, orders were given to carry on direct to the newly captured port of Siracusa, in southeast Sicily. The MT ships dropped out of the convoy, and the LSTs sailed north-west under escort. The night was bright with an almost full moon. At 0230 hours 13 July, enemy aircraft flew over the convoy, and were engaged by our AA, but no attack developed. At first light, the Sicilian coast could be clearly seen, and at 1030, the convoy arrived off Siracusa.

As the port authorities had not been advised of the change in plans, the LSTs had to anchor in the harbour until 1730 hours, when unloading commenced. During the afternoon, Lt.-Col. Johnston left in a small boat to take over command of the brigade, in the absence of Brig. R. A. Wyman, whose ship had not arrived.

At 1730, unloading commenced onto the promenade at the northeast end of the harbour. The ramps of the LSTs were lowered directly on the promenade, and all the vehicles landed by the light of a full moon, and just as they started off down the street German aircraft came over the port, and all the

AA around the harbour and on board the ships opened up. The harbour was rapidly obscured by smoke-pots and visibility on the highway was completely obscured.

The regt. left Siracusa, and moved southwest down highway 115 to a brigade concentration area at Cassibile. The tanks and trucks were dispersed in an almond grove. Personnel bedded down beside their vehicles until stand-to at 0400 hours.

Stand-to was accompanied by an air raid on Siracusa. No attack was made on the Cassibile area, but most of our own AA burst over the harbour area, and quantities of jagged bits of metal, interspersed with an occasional dud shell fell into the area. This was a nightly occurrence in the harbour, and led to a habit of sleeping under tanks. After stand-down at 0600 hours breakfast was made with 48-hour landing ration packs, and de-waterproofing of vehicles was begun. An information O group was held at 1 CAB at 0830 hours. Ragusa and Augusta had been captured, and 8 Army was preparing to attack Catania.

In the evening, wheeled vehicles unloaded at George Beach were moved into harbour with the assault vehicles. These had to wade ashore, being lightered from the freighters by LCTs and driven off the LCTs. Brig. Wyman arrived and took command of 1 CAB. Lt.-Col. Johnston resumed command of the regt. At 2230 hours, there was an air raid of 1½ hours duration.

On 15 July, 43, 1 CAB less 12 CAR came under command of Maj.-Gen. Erskine, who was assembling an army reserve for exploitation or counter-attack as the case might demand. Lt.-Col. Johnston and the I. O. made a reconnaissance to Lentini to prepare for any move up Highway 114, the only axis from Siracusa north. The road was a narrow paved highway, running through barren grey limestone rocks. Wide enough for 2-way traffic when it was straight, it wound so much that long stretches were in fact one-way. There was little control, and a huge volume of heavy traffic, so the road was packed with military vehicles of all types, nose to tail. A blown bridge over a deep gorge necessitated a long and difficult diversion, which further slowed traffic. The sun shone with tropical intensity, and vehicles were too hot to touch, while both vehicles and men were coated with the light grey limestone dust.

The next day, sqn cmds made a reconnaissance of the same road. Capt. H. F. F. Millen's scout car was lost on a mine south

of Primasola Bridge, but there were no casualties.

At 0030 hours 17 July, the Cameronia docked at Siracusa. Personnel on board had to march to Cassibile with all their equipment, including kitbags. During the day, sqn 2 i-cs made a recce north to Primasola Bridge.

On 18 July, sqn cmds and C. O. did a TEWT over battle areas, in the area of Solarino and Sortino. The following day, sqn cmds took their offrs over the route.

In the evening, orders were received from 1CAB to move next morning to the area of Monte Serravalle, on the southern edge of Catania Plain. No information was passed out about the role on arrival there, but it was known that 8 Army was now held up all along Catania Plain by stiff German resistance, and had paused to regroup for a fresh thrust.

The move started at 0530 hours. The day was again hot and bright, and traffic was still far above the capacity of the Siracusa-Lentini road. The addition of 2 regts of tanks in the busiest period of the day choked the road completely, and the head of the column arrived at Villasmundo, 27 miles from the start point, in 8 hours. As the move was preventing any supplies from getting up to forward areas, the column was put off the road until night, and the regiment pulled off into a field southeast of Villasmundo. Lt.-Col. Johnston received orders to make a recce of the front west from Primasola bridge, so he and the I. O. left at once for the new harbour area.

The regiment moved again at 2300 hours, via Lentini and Carlentini to a harbour behind Monte Del Casale, just east of M. Serravalle. These hills were rocky, steep elevations, overlooking Catania Plain. Olives grew at the base and numerous cacti flourished on the limestone cliffs. Between them and Gorna Lunga River was about 4000 yds of rolling country, for the most part under observation from the German positions on the slopes of Etna. The rolling ground in front of the hills was largely cultivated, with farmhouses and irrigation ditches. There were few trees, and the only cover was afforded by reverse slopes. All vegetation was yellow and dried out, and easily ignited.

#### IV THE CALABRIAN CAMPAIGN

On 21 Aug 45, preliminary planning for the next operation began. This was to be the first landing on the mainland of Europe. 5 British Infantry Div., with 11 Cdn Armd Regt in support, was to

carry out an assault on the Southern coast of Calabria, directly across the Straits of Messina. 1 Cdn Div, with 14 Cdn Armd Regt was to go in just south of 5 Div, at Reggio di Calabria. The operation was under command of 13 Corps, and was known by the code name Baytown.

On 22 Aug 43, the first planning conference was held at 5 Div HQ in the Duke's Palace at Misterbianco. The nature of the country precluded any extensive use of tanks, so only one squadron and RHQ were waterproofed. On 2 Aug, B Sqn tanks, 4 RHQ tanks, 2 bridge-layers, and an assault echelon for one squadron left for a concentration area south of Catania where they were to be waterproofed and start their trip through the sausage machine onto LSTs.

During this period, Maj H. E. Irwin, who was acting as liaison officer with 5 Div lost his arm in a scout car accident. Capt. H. A. Smith, 2 i/c of B Sqn took over C squadron.

The final plan for the operation was soon developed. The object was twofold. First, to open the Straits of Messina for the Royal Navy, and, second, to engage as many German troops as possible in south Italy, thus thinning out the concentration in the Naples area. The nature of the country made any large-scale use of tanks most unlikely. North of Reggio, there was a narrow, thickly inhabited coastal plain, about 500 yds wide. Beyond this, the ground rose steeply into the rocky, terraced hills of Aspromonte. A few second-class roads ran inland, climbing off the plain in loops and zig-zags. Fortunately for the troops who had to assault this formidable coast, communications to the north were so tenuous that the Germans, fearing further landings, committed only enough troops in the area to carry out demolitions and discover the strength of the assault. The Italian coast defense troops were taken prisoner as quickly as their positions could be reached.

The division planned to land with 2 brigades up, on beaches north of Reggio di Calabria. On the southern beach, George Beach 4449, 13 Bde was to land, with the task of seizing and holding the high ground overlooking the beaches, blocking the road leading to the beach, in the area of San Stefano, and sending recce east as far as Montalto, the highest peak of Aspromonte.

Landing on the Northern beach, How Beach 4452, 17 Inf Bde was to seize and hold the high ground around Villa Sambatello, and block all approaches from the north and east. In the event of light opposition, 17 Bde was to carry

on to the high ground overlooking Villa San Giovanni, one of the mainland termini of the Messina train ferry, and capture that town and Cannitello. This latter plan was carried out.

Three other landings were planned as part of the operation. First was the assault, already mentioned, of 1 Cdn Inf Div to capture Reggio and Reggio airfield. Second, S. R. Sqn, SAS Regt was landing at H+5 between Scilla and Bagnata Calabria to demolish the coast road. At the same time, 3 Commando was to go ashore near Melito di Porto Salvo with the same task. In Corps reserve was 231 Independent Inf Bde with 40 Commando under command. This brigade, a self-sufficient formation with its own artillery, engineers, recce, etc., and specially trained in combined operations was held ready to land at any time after 1800 hrs on D-day between Scilla and Bagnara.

Shipping available for the operation was limited, as a large proportion of the landing craft in the Central Mediterranean were tied up in the Salerno and Tarento landings. Consequently, 5 Div established a ferry service, based initially on Catania, later on the beaches of northeast Sicily and on Messina. All vehicles for the initial assault were marshalled south of Catania by 31 Aug 43.

B Sqn and RHQ, complete with assault echelons, embarked on LSTs at Catania. The LSTs sailed south to Augusta Harbour where they remained until 0100 hrs 3 Sep 43.

Other RHQ vehicles which were to travel on the ferry service proceeded to Santa Teresa di Riva, under command of Capt W. J. E. Simmons. The remainder of A Echelon and A Sqn also loaded here. B Echelon was brigaded, and C Sqn remained in Sicily until the end of the Calabrian campaign.

D-Day was 3 Sept., Gapping patrols landed, supported by infantry at 0600 hrs. At 0630 hrs, the main assault wave landed. As intelligence had forecast for 3 days that the Germans had left the Reggio area, opposition was confined to very slight shelling and attacks by fighter-bombers. The Italians proved unwilling to fight at all. Coast defense troops with white flags met the assault waves on the beaches and helped them to unload the landing craft. The beaches were mined and studded with pill-boxes and dugouts. In the hills behind the beaches were forts and gun emplacements. But there were no troops manning these strongly constructed defenses, and all objectives for D + 4 were taken by H + 9. At 1600 hrs on D day, most of the RHQ tank crews were swimming in the straits of

Messina. Heavy demolitions had been expected in the area, but none in fact materialized until the advance reached Bagnara Calabria.

B Sqn landed on the beach at Callio Marina at 0900 hrs. Capt L. I. Knowls was accidentally wounded while guiding tks off the LST. Gallico Marina was a small town whose main street, wide enough for tanks and heavy vehicles, ran onto a sand and gravel beach. Vehicles could drive dry-shod from LSTs onto the street, which lead to the main road north from Reggio. As it had not been planned to land tanks on this beach, no guides from 17 Bde met B Sqn, and they were unable to contact the brigade, which was progressing much more rapidly than had been anticipated.

Progress of the tanks was further slowed by traffic conditions. The main coast road was jammed with vehicles of all kinds looking for harbour areas, and the exits from the beaches were completely choked. When finally the squadron did join up, the services of tanks were not needed, as there was no opposition. In the afternoon, 2 troops accompanied the infantry through Villa San Giovanni. The squadron was then concentrated near Concessa in order to get it off the road.

RHQ landed on the Gallico beach at 1100 hrs. The vehicles were driven off the road beside a church, and Lt-Col Johnston went to find Div HQ. Tac Div HQ had also landed on the wrong beach and could not be found. But the Divisional Commander was located. He gave orders to get all tanks off the road and await developments. After some searching, a suitable harbour was found near Catona.

Thus the first day ended. 699 prisoners were taken by 5 Div, of whom 2 were Germans. No serious opposition was encountered at any time. So long as conditions remained the same, tanks would not be used. The necessity of operating on a single center line made them a great hindrance to traffic, and in any case, it was impossible to deploy them off the road.

At 0300 hrs on 4 Sep, A Echelon landed with A Sqn wheels and harboured near RHQ. A Sqn tanks landed on 5 Sep and harboured in a wadi north of Catona.

At 0350 hrs on 4 Sep, B Sqn was warned to move if required in support of 15 Inf Bde (1 York & Lancs, 1 Green Howards and 1 KOYLI). 17 Bde by now held the high ground covering Cannitello and Villa S. Giovanni with patrols forward toward Scilla. 15 Bde. was to pass through these positions, capture Melieucca and Paperone, and cut the



lateral road Sinopoli-Pellegrina at a point southeast of Pellegrina.

15 Bde made contact with the enemy (III Bn 15 Pz Gr. Regt) in the area of Bagnara Calabria. But north of Scilla, a major demolition blocked the road to all traffic, so the tank move had to be called off.

This was the last time in the Calabrian campaign that the operational use of tanks became at all likely. The nature of the advance, a series of rapid moves up a mountainous coast, carried on in great measure by leap-frogging in LCIs and DUKW's, made it most difficult for tanks to keep up with the infantry. All traffic was confined to one narrow corniche road, winding up and down the mountains in almost continuous hairpin bends and Jacob's ladders. Consequently, every demolition put the regiment a little farther behind the leading elements. A long road run by tanks choked off supplies coming up the road, and the division was most reluctant to do this, as the supply situation was quite difficult enough without this further complication.

The regiment remained in the Catona harbour until 7 Sep. The day previous, orders had been given to move to the Palmi area. Resistance was being met here from elements of 15 Pz. Gr. Regt (29 P. G. Div) and it was thought that tanks could be used on the Rosarno Plain, north of Palmi.

The road from Villa S. Giovanni to Palmi was one of the most difficult seen by the regiment up to this time. Southwest of Bagnara, traffic was routed through a railway tunnel to get around an impassable blow in the coast road. As it was not certain whether tanks could negotiate the difficult diversion through Bagnara by which they had to leave the tunnel, it was decided to send one tank accompanied by a recovery tank as an experiment. At 1400 hrs, A Echelon wheels left, followed by the 2 tanks. These tanks climbed the diversion successfully, though it was necessary to drive over a house in order to widen one turn. This created a new problem, filling the narrow alley up which the diversion ran with loose rubble. The grade was so steep that the tank tracks merely rolled the rubble back. But when sufficient rubble was dug out, the tanks went up.

The following day, the remainder of the regiment moved up the same route, passing through Palmi to a harbour in a large olive grove at Gioja Tauro. Across the road, a huge untouched Italian dump was discovered, and a diesel-driven Italian 3-ton truck was acquired. At 2000 hrs, div passed down the news that Italy had surrendered uncondition-

ally. This caused considerable optimism, but no change in immediate plans, as the Germans were still the sole opposition in Calabria. It merely regularized the non-combatant status of the Italians.

By this time, the Germans had evacuated the Rosarno Plain, blowing the bridge over the Mesima River. 13 Inf Bde held a substantial bridgehead over the Mesima, extending to the southern outskirts of Nicotera. On the night of 8/9 Sep, 231 Bde landed at Pizzo, farther up the coast. After a sharp battle, the brigade established itself on the high ground between Pizzo and the River. Once established, the brigade lost contact, and the need for tanks once again disappeared.

On 9 Sep, the regiment was put on half-hour notice to move after 1030 hrs. The news of the Salerno landings, much magnified by rumour, was heard for the first time. At 1200 hrs, A Sqn moved to a harbour north of Rosarno, and 2 troops, with Capt E. A. C Amy in charge, were detached under 5 Recce to thicken up the recce patrols on the roads north to Nicastro. At 1400 hrs, the regiment moved into a harbour near Vibo Valentia airfield, while Capt Amy's 2 troops harboured along the road between Vibo Valentia and Pizzo.

The tenuous supply line was now beginning to run out. It was decided to hold up the advance for 4 days, until 14 Sep in order to build up dumps in the Plain of St. Eufemia. The regt moved into a rest area in an olive grove on the plain. The divisional engineers cleared part of the beach, and swimming parades varied the routine of daily maintenance.

The advance was resumed on 14 Sep. 5 Recce went forward and found the coast road intact. As the Italians had been responsible for demolitions on this road, none had been carried out. Meeting no opposition, the recce advanced north at great speed. The two troops under Capt Amy accompanied them, but saw no action, as there was very little contact. By 18 Sep, the regiment was hopelessly behind 5 Div, which had made contact with U.S. forces from the Salerno bridgehead on 16 Sep. So at 0100 hrs 18 Sep the regiment reverted to command of 13 Corps. The wheeled vehicles moved at once to Praiaa Mare, a small seaside resort with a large and attractive beach. There they were joined by C Sqn, which had been brought from Sicily in LCTs. The remainder of the tanks were brought up by LCT on the night 18/19 Sept, and the regiment formed a rest harbour at Praia. Maintenance was carried on, and

swimming and sports were organized.

This concluded the Calabrian campaign. The regiment never fired a shot during the whole 15 days it lasted. The drivers of the tanks and trucks, however, will not soon forget the winding coastal road; and their feat in moving the tanks up this road without a single serious accident was a post which justified all the tedious hours of driving practice in England.

### 111 Early Actions in Sicily.

On 21 July, at 0300 hours, the Regt. less B Echelon arrived in the Monte del Casale area. B Echelon was brigaded and left in the area east of Scordia.

Lt-Col. Johnston and Lt. McNichol made a reconnaissance of the Catania plain front, west of Primasola Bridge. The Gorna Lunga river was found not to be a complete tank obstacle. At this time of year, it was a dry stream bed. At most points, it had steep banks of soft, crumbling earth, which could not be climbed by a Sherman. But there were breaks in these where a tank could cross. Though passable in places, the stream-bed definitely canalized all movement. The whole front and a considerable area behind it were under enemy observation from the Etna Massif. But equally, any movement by the enemy on the forward slopes of the mountain, and in the towns could be seen clearly. In the morning, the whole mountain was visible, with a smoke plume usually rising out of the crest. But, as the day went on, the heat haze rapidly descended, and most of the actual mountain mass was blotted out, though the belt of towns at its base, Paterno, Belasso, and Misterbianco, could be seen.

The following day, 22 July, final orders for occupation of a defensive position on Catania plain were issued.

The attack across the Catania Plain was to be heavily weighted on the right and left flanks, while the centre was to be left bare. As there were 2 possible exits from the plain in this central area, where an enemy counter-attack might carry into the Lentini-Scordia area, this sector was to be covered by 11 and 14 Regts, supported by a back-stop of anti-tank guns, and by a regiment of self-propelled artillery. In front, as a screening and patrolling force, was 5 Recce Regt, detached from 5 British Infantry Division. 11 Regt held the left sector, a 6 mile front in the rolling country on the southern edge of the plain. It was held with 2 squadrons up and one in reserve behind M. del Casale. RHQ was estab-

lished around some farm buildings at 744622 at first light 23 July. A Sqn took up a position behind the feature at 7064 and 7164, B Sqn was scattered, covering a large area to the northeast of RHQ. It was feared that the enemy might ignite the dry grass with incendiary shells, so fire positions were burned over before being occupied. Each morning at first light, sqns rotated. The reserve sqn took over the right flank position, the right sqn moved to the left flank, and the left sqn moved into reserve. On the dried out ground of the plain, this created great dust-clouds, which were plainly visible to the enemy. Thanks probably to a German shortage of artillery, this failed to draw any significant shelling.

The recce troop under Capt. A. B. Harrison and Lt. K. D. McCord was coordinated with 5 Recce Regt, and one of these officers remained at RHQ of the regt every night. During the hours of darkness, the tanks were withdrawn and their places were taken by carriers.

392 Battery, 98 Fd Regt (S. P.) RA (Surrey and Sussex Yeomanry, QMR), commanded by Maj. G. H. Peile (Mc and bar) came in support of the regt. This was the beginning of a long association with this battery, which supported the regt for the last time at Arnhem in April 1945. The battery consisted of 8 self-propelled 105 mm gun-hows.

A and B Sqns took up positions, A sqn right and B sqn left. The next day, C sqn took over the right position, A sqn moved to the left, and B sqn went into reserve. This rotation continued until 28 July, creating an impression of furious activity. The only reaction provoked was a light shelling on 25 July.

On 27 July, Gen. Montgomery, GOC in C 8th Army visited the regt in its positions. A tank demonstration was arranged, and the Army Commander was introduced to all the officers. Squadrons of Bostons and Mitchells passed over head, dropping their bombs on Paterno, in full view of our positions.

On 28 July, the brigade passed from under command 30 Corps to under command 13 Corps, commanded by Lt.-Gen. Dempsey. All forward recce was stopped. Tanks were ordered hidden, and daylight movement on the plain was forbidden. This hiding continued on 29 July. At last light, a wireless deception scheme was enacted by RHQ. Passing the microphone around among them, messages were sent on the regt net simulating a move to Primasola Bridge.

On the morning of 30 July, the regt

less B Echelon was warned to be ready to move under cover of darkness to the area of Colle dell' Olmo, north of the Gorna Lunga and west of the Dittaino. 51 (Highland) Div. was concentrated west of this area, and was attacking north across Sferro Bridge 6877 to clear the high ground at the western end of Cattania Plain. The Sferro bridge and the bridge at Stimato 7171 were intact. An enemy counter-attack across these bridges in the direction of Ramacca would cut 51 Div's supply lines. The high ground overlooking the Dittaino from the west afforded a natural block to any such attempt, and 13 Inf. Bde. was detached from 5 (Br) Inf. Div. to organize the defense of this ground, and to secure the two bridges from destruction by the enemy. 13 Bde. was commanded by Brig. Lorne Campbell (VC) and normally consisted of 2 Wilts, 2 Inniskillings, and 2 Cameronians. For this operation, it had under command, in addition to 11 Cdn Armd Regt, a battalion of Royal Marine Commandos, one Bn. Hants, and one Coy. of sp bn of 5 Div. Lt.-Col. Johnston and Lt. McNichol made liason with Bde. HQ and did a recon during the morning. Orders for the move were given on their return.

Wheeled vehicles moved at 2100 hrs, followed by the tanks. The route was along dirt tracks across Catania Plain. The night was black, dark and moonless, and the air was made even more opaque by the clouds of dust which the trucks and tanks raised from the dry clay. No light could be shown, and for most of the route it was necessary for a man to walk in front of each vehicle to keep it on the road. RHQ, A and C Sqn's harboured in a dry stream-bed in the high ground north of Colle Dell' Olmo, just in front of the guns. One troop was detached to watch Stimpato Bridge. B sqn harboured about 4000 yards southwest of Sferro Bridge, with one troop forward in the river-bed 1000 yards southeast of the bridge. This troop was under command of Capt. L. I. Knowles.

Once the move was ended, troops spent the last day of July resting and doing maintenance. Officers were busy making liason with the infantry. Capt. A. B. Harrison was sent to 13 Bde. with a wireless-equipped carrier as a liason officer. At 2350 hours, the quiet was abruptly broken by the opening shots of a barrage. 51 Div. was attacking to clear the high ground northwest of the Sferro bridgehead.

By 1000 hours 1 Aug., 51 Div. had taken all their objectives. A German counter-attack supported by 8 tanks,

however, forced them off trig. pt. 224, 6881. At 1240 hours, 25 German tanks were reported at this location. The regiment stood to on 10 minutes notice. Artillery opened up on the enemy AFV's and they retreated toward Paterno. One Tiger brewed up. As a result of 51 Div's success, B sqn put a troop across Sferro Bridge. The next day was very quiet, with indications all along the front of an enemy withdrawal. A tank of B sqn, with Capt. L. I. Knowles in command and Tpr. M. Corrigan as a gunner became the first tank in the regiment to engage the enemy when it shot up a German OP in a haystack near Sferro Bridge.

An ambitious patrolling program was laid on for 3 Aug. in an attempt to locate the enemy. At 1200 hours, one troop of A sqn supported carriers and infantry in a patrol to Gerbini and north to the Simeto River at Poggio del Monaco. The infantry commander and Lt. D. S. Barlow explored beyond the Simeto in a jeep. The only opposition encountered was from 2 37 mm guns which engaged the carriers. These were silenced by the tanks. This patrol returned at 1800 hours. B sqn supported a patrol to Monte Turcisi, and covered its withdrawal with smoke.

An orders group was held at 13 Bde. HQ at 1800 hours. The Bde. group held the R. M. Commando and the Hants battalion was to follow up the German withdrawal and seize a bridgehead over the Simeto River at the bridge east of Poggio Monaco. The crossing was to be made by 2 Innisks, with B sqn in support. B sqn was to move at once, to be in position by first light. At 2000 hours, B sqn moved off. On arrival at Poggio Monaco, Maj. D. H. Lander found the bridge was blown. As it was impossible to get tanks across the river, the sqn took up fire positions around Poggio Monaco and engaged any targets which appeared across the river.

The remainder of the regt. moved off at 0200 hours, after a 6-hour delay. The head of the column had just arrived in Sferro when the whole regiment was ordered to turn back and harbour west of the Dittaino. At 0500 hours, all tanks were back in harbour.

At 0800 hours, Lt.-Col. Johnston accompanied Brig. Campbell on a recon to Gerbini, and at 1200 hours he called for C sqn to move up to Gerbini station. The tanks were held up by a bad crossing of the Simeto, and, when they finally got across at 1700 hours, the Germans abandoned the area and retired to Paterno. Brig. Campbell wished to push on to Paterno, but corps stopped the brigade group. B sqn re-



mained for the night at Poggio Monaco, C sqn in the vicinity of Gerbini. A sqn was ordered up to tie in with infantry south of Paterno.

On 5 Aug., C sqn sent a troop each up the main roads leading to Paterno from the south. These troops supported infantry patrols and were commanded by Lts. W. G. Harrod and W. S. Ecclestone. The bridges where these roads crossed the railway were blown, and the patrols stopped on the line of the railway. Opposition from mortars and MGs was encountered.

At 1700 hours, C sqn less these 2 troops supported 2 Cameronians in a set-piece attack on M. Prefalaci, a dominating hill feature about 1500 yards southeast of Paterno. The attack was successful, and a machine-gun nest and a mortar position were destroyed.

At last light, A sqn detached one troop to support infantry on this feature in case of a counter-attack. Accompanied by infantry guides, the troop set off in darkness over steep and narrow lanes. Mines were encountered, but these were lifted, and the troop arrived without casualties.

RHQ had moved at 1200 hours to an area north of Sferro on the road Sferro Paterno.

Considerable difficulty was encountered during this period with wireless. As the sun set, a blanket of interference came down, making communication most unreliable. If a hill lay between stations, communication was impossible.

A and C sqns were ready the morning of 6 Aug. to support 2 battalions of infantry in an attack on Paterno, but this proved unnecessary. Patrols reported the town clear, and at 1200 hours it was entered without opposition. The town was considerably damaged by our bombers, but the population gave our troops a warm reception. RHQ moved across the Simeto to an olive grove about 3 miles south of Paterno. Capt. McKay, Regimental Medical Officer, was severely injured when a tank picked up a strand of barbed wire and dragged it across the back of his legs. He was evacuated and replaced by Capt. S. Kobinsky.

5 Recce moved out from Paterno, but failed to gain contact during the day. The enemy had apparently retired out of gun range, as there was no shelling of the town during the day. A and C sqns remained with infantry on the eastern outskirts of Paterno, while B sqn harboured on the plain with RHQ.

On 7 Aug., B sqn moved off in support of 2 Innisks, on an approach to

contact move up the axis Paterno-Belpasso-Nicolosi. A detachment of 5 recce preceded the group up the road. Belpasso was clear, but in the afternoon, the enemy was found on the high ground north of Pedara. Nicolosi was occupied, and came under mortar and shell-fire. RHQ moved to Sorgente Acquatozza, northeast of Paterno.

Patrols were unable to dislodge the enemy, firmly dug in in unknown strength on Tre Monti, three steep hills which rose in an isolated group north of Pedara. The infantry tried a night attack, but lost direction in the darkness and never reached the objective. An attack was then teed up by 2 Inniskillings supported by B sqn.

At first light 8 Aug. the attack went in. Tanks were unable to climb the hills, but supported by firing on targets on the forward slopes. Opposition was stiff, with considerable heavy mortaring. The objective was reached, but a determined counter-attack put the Germans back on the crest. At 1700 hours arty concentrations were laid on the hills and fighting patrols sent up. The enemy was found still holding the position in strength. B sqn assisted the artillery, shooting up the area over open sights to very good effect.

The enemy left Tre Monti and broke contact during the night. Pursuit was held up by demolitions. As the road north from Nicolosi runs long stretches on a causeway through impassable lava field, a crater was sufficient to stop all movement until it could be filled in. The Germans blocked the road in several places with large charges which blew craters about 30 feet in diameter.

During the night, the enemy withdrew beyond Zafferana Etneo, and blew the bridge north of the town. Infantry established a bridgehead, and at 0900 hours A sqn put 2 troops under Lts. A. W. Hawkins and W. D. Shirriff across by a diversion.

On this day, 10 Aug., orders were received to return to a brigade concentration area on completion of the present operations. C sqn moved back to a harbour southeast of Gerbini airfield, Bsqn to an area southwest of Belpasso.

The bridgehead at Zafferana was counter-attacked at about 1800 hours by enemy infantry and tanks. One enemy tank was destroyed, claimed by Lt. A. W. Hawkins' crew. This was the first AFV bagged by the regiment.

Most of the regiment was on the move back early on 11 Aug. C sqn completed their move to the concentration area, which was the old Monte del Casale harbour. RHQ, B sqn and A Eche-



lon moved at 0700 hours to C sqn's harbour of the previous night. At 0600 hrs A sqn's relief started, and it joined them during the day. Night bombers attacked the new regimental area at 2300 hours, killing one and wounding 2.

By 0930 hours 12 Aug., the regiment was complete in the concentration area.

Maintenance on vehicles was begun, and a program of brigade and regimental sports started.

The concentration area was far from perfect. Near the highly malarious Lago di Lentini, it was dusty, unshaded and full of flies. No buildings were available where men could get out of the sun. Numerous cases of malaria developed, which combined with an epidemic of dysentery to reduce the regiment below efficient fighting strength for some time.

On 20 Aug., Gen. Montgomery visited the regiment and spoke informally to officers and men.

On 23 Aug., the regimental team won the brigade sports meet. Lt.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, GOC in C First Cdn. Army attended the meet and spoke to all ranks of the brigade.

This ended the Sicilian campaign. A period of light skirmishes in difficult and varied country, it taught many useful lessons, and provided an ideal baptism of fire for green troops. Being thus eased into battle undoubtedly cut the later casualties suffered in major actions by many times.

It was planned to pass A sqn through B sqn. But demolitions and the narrow road, where two tanks could not pass each other, held up this move. RHQ moved to Nicolosi. Contact was regained briefly, but 1900 hours, when A sqn was able to move up, it was too late to commit tanks, and the squadron harboured north of Trecastagni.

#### IV THE CALABRIAN CAMPAIGN

On 21 Aug 45, preliminary planning for the next operation began. This was to be the first landing on the mainland of Europe. 5 British Infantry Div., with 11 Cdn Armd Regt in support, was to carry out an assault on the southern coast of Calabria, directly across the Straits of Messina. 1 Cdn Div. with 14 Cdn Armd Regt was to go in just south of 5 Div, at Reggio di Calabria. The operation was under command of 13 Corps, and was known by the code name Baytown.

On 22 Aug 45, the first planning conference was held at 5 Div HQ in the Duke's Palace at Misterbianco. The nature of the country precluded any extensive use of tanks, so only one squ-

adron and RHQ were waterproofed. On 2 Aug, B sqn tanks, 4 RHQ tanks, 2 bridgelayers, and an assault echelon for one squadron left for a concentration area south of Catania where they were to be waterproofed and start their trip through the sausage machine onto LSTs.

During this period, Maj. H. E. Irwin, who was acting liaison officer with 5 Div lost his arm in a scout car accident. Capt. H. A. Smith, 2 i-c of B sqn took over C squadron.

The final plan for the operation was soon developed. The object was twofold. First, to open the Straits of Messina for the Royal Navy, and second to engage as many German troops as possible in south Italy, thus thinning out the concentration in the Naples area. The nature of the country made any large-scale use of tanks most unlikely. North of Reggio, there was a narrow, thickly inhabited coastal plain, about 500 yds wide. Beyond this, the ground rose steeply into the rocky, terraced hills of Aspromonte. A few second-class roads ran inland, climbing off the plain in loops and zig-zags. Fortunately for the troops who had to assault this formidable coast, communications to the north were so tenuous that the Germans fearing further landings, committed only enough troops in the area to carry out demolitions and discover the strength of the assault. The Italian coast defense troops were taken prisoner as quickly as their positions could be reached.

The division planned to land with 2 brigades up, on beaches north of Reggio di Calabria. On the southern beach, George beach 4449, 13 Bde was to land, with the task of seizing and holding the high ground overlooking the beaches blocking the road leading to the beach, in the area of San Stefano, and sending reconnaissance east as far as Montalto, the highest peak of Aspromonte.

Landing on the Northern beach, How Beach 4452, 17 Inf Bde was to seize and hold the high ground around Villa Sambatello, and block all approaches from the north and east. In the event of light opposition, 17 Bde was to carry on to the high ground overlooking Villa San Giovanni, one of the mainland termini of the Messina train ferry, and capture that town and Cannitello. This latter plan was carried out.

Three other landings were planned as part of the operation. First was the assault, already mentioned, of 1 Cdn Inf Div to capture Reggio and Reggio airfield. Second, S. R. Sqn, SAS Regt was landing at H+5 between Scilla and Bagnata Calabria to demolish the coast road. At the same time, 3 Commando was to go ashore near Melito di Porto

Salvo with the same task. I Corps reserve was 231 Independent Inf Bde. with 40 Commando under command. This brigade, a self-sufficient formation with its own artillery, engineers, recce, etc., and specially trained in combined operations was held ready to land at any time after 1800 hrs on D-day between Scilla and Bagnara.

Shipping available for the operation was limited, as a large porportion of the landing craft in the Central Mediterranean were tied up in the Salerno and Tarento landings. Consequently, 5 Div established a ferry service, based initially on Catania, later on the beaches of northeast Sicily and on Messina. All vehicles for the initial assault were marshalled south of Catania by 31 Aug. 43.

B Sqn and RHQ complete with assault echelons, embarked on LSTs at Catania. The LSTs sailed south to Augusta Harbour where they remained until 0100 hrs 3 Sep 43.

Other RHQ vehicles which were to travel on the ferry service proceeded to Santa Teresa di Riva, under command of Capt. W. J. E. Simmons. The remainder of A Echelon and A sqn also loaded here. B echelon was brigaded, and C sqn remained in Sicily until the end of the Calabrian campaign.

D-Day was 3 Sept., Gapping patrols landed, supported by infantry at 0600 hrs. At 0630 hrs, the main assault wave landed. As intelligence had forecast for 3 days that the Germans had left the Reggio area, opposition was confined to very slight shelling and attacks by fighter-bombers. The Italians proved unwilling to fight at all. Coast defense troops with white flags met the assault waves on the beaches and helped them to unload the landing craft. The beaches were mined and studded with pill-boxes and dug-outs. In the hills behind the beaches were forts and gun emplacements. But there were no troops manning these strongly constructed defenses, and all objectives for D+4 were taken by H + 9. At 1600 hrs on D day most of the RHQ tank crews were swimming in the straits of Messina. Heavy demolitions had been expected in the area, but none in fact materialized until the advance reached Bagnara Calabria.

B sqn landed on the beach at Callio Marina at 0900 hrs. Capt. L. I. Knowles was accidentally wounded while guiding tanks off the LST. Gallico Marina was a small town whose main street, wide enough for tanks and heavy vehicles, ran unto a sand and gravel beach. Vehicles could drive dry-shod from LSTs

onto the street, which lead to the main road north from Reggio. As it had not been planned to land tanks on this beach, no guides from 17 Bde met B sqn, and they were unable to contact the brigade, which was progressing much more rapidly than had been anticipated.

Progress of the tanks was further slowed by traffic conditions. The main coast road was jammed with vehicles of all kinds looking for harbour areas, and the exits from the beaches were completely choked. When finally the squadron did join up, the services of tanks were not needed, as there was no opposition. In the afternoon, 2 troops accompanied the infantry through Villa San Giovanni. The squadron was then concentrated near Concessa in order to get it off the road.

RHQ landed on the Gallico beach at 1100 hrs. The vehicles were driven off the road beside a church, and Lt.-Col. Johnston went to find Div HQ. Tac Div HQ had also landed on the wrong beach and could not be found. But the Divisional Commander was located. He gave orders to get all tanks off the road and await developments. After some searching, a suitable harbour was found near Catona.

Thus the first day ended. 699 prisoners were taken by 5 Div, of whom 2 were Germans. No serious opposition was encountered at any time. So long as conditions remained the same, tanks would not be used. The necessity of operating on a single center line made them a great hindrance to traffic, and in any case, it was impossible to deploy them off the road.

At 0300 hrs on 4 Sep, A Echelon landed with A sqn wheels and harboured near RHQ. A sqn tanks landed on 5 Sep and harboured in a wadi north of Catona.

At 0350 hrs on 4 Sep, B Sqn was warned to move if required in support of 15 Inf Bde (1 York & Lancs, 1 Green Howards and 1 KOYL). 17 Bde by now held the high ground covering Cannitello and Villa S. Giovanni with patrols forward toward Scilla. 15 Bde captured Melieuca and Paperone, and was to pass through these positions, cut the lateral road Sinopoli - Pelleggrina at a point southeast of Pellegrina.

15 Bde made contact with the enemy (111 Bn 15 Pz Gr. Regt) in the area of Bagnara Calabria. But north of Scilla, a major demolition blocked the road to all traffic, so the tank move had to be called off.

This was the last time in the Calabrian campaign that the operational use

of tanks became at all likely. The nature of the advance, a series of rapid moves up a mountainous coast, carried on in great measure by leap-frogging in LCIs and DUKW's, made it most difficult for tanks to keep up with the infantry. All traffic was confined to one narrow corniche road, winding up and down the mountains in almost continuous hairpin bends and Jacob's ladders. Consequently, every demolition put the regiment a little farther behind the leading elements. A long road run by tanks choked off supplies coming up the road, and the division was most reluctant to do this, as the supply situation was quite difficult enough without this further complication.

The regiment remained in the Catona harbour until 7 Sep. The day previous, orders had been given to move to the Palmi area. Resistance was being met here from elements of 15 Pz. Gr. Regt (29 P. G. Div) and it was thought that tanks could be used on the Rosarno Plain, north of Palmi.

The road from Villa S. Giovanni to Palmi was one of the most difficult seen by the regiment up to this time. Southwest of Bagnara, traffic was routed through a railway tunnel to get around an impassable blow in the coast road. As it was not certain whether tanks could negotiate the difficult diversion through Bagnara by which they had to leave the tunnel, it was decided to send one tank accompanied by a recovery tank as an experiment. At 1400 hrs, A echelon wheels left, followed by the 2 tanks. These tanks climbed the diversion successfully, though it was necessary to drive over a house in order to widen one turn. This created a new problem, filling the narrow alley up which the diversion ran with loose rubble. The grade was so steep that the tank tracks merely rolled the rubble back. But when sufficient rubble was dug out, the tanks went up.

The following day, the remainder of the regiment moved up the same route, passing through Palmi to a harbour in a large olive grove at Gioja Tauro. Across the road, a huge untouched Italian dump was discovered, and a diesel driven Italian 3-ton truck was acquired. At 2000 hrs, div passed down the news that Italy had surrendered unconditionally. This caused considerable optimism, but no change in immediate plans, as the Germans were still the sole opposition in Calabria. It merely regularized the non-combatant status of the Italians.

By this time, the Germans had evacuated the Rosarno Plain, blowing the bridge over the Mesima River. 13 Inf Bde held a substantial bridgehead over the Mesima, extending to the southern outskirts of Nicotera. On the night of 8-9 Sep, 231 Bde landed at Pizzo, farther up the coast. After a sharp battle, the brigade established itself on the high ground between Pizzo and the river. Once established, the brigade lost contact, and the need for tanks once again disappeared.

On 9 Sep, the regiment was put on half-hour notice to move after 1030 hrs. The news of the Salerno landings, much magnified by rumour, was heard for the first time. At 1200 hrs, A sqn moved to a harbour north of Rosarno, and 2 troops, with Capt. E. A. C. Amy in charge were detached under 5 Recce to thicken up the recce patrols on the roads north to Nicastro. At 1400 hrs, the regiment moved into a harbour near Vibo Valentia airfield, while Capt. Amy's 2 troops harboured along the road between Vibo Valentia and Pizzo.

The tenuous supply line was now beginning to run out. It was decided to hold up the advance for 4 days until 14 Sep, in order to build up dumps in the Plain of St Eufemia. The regt moved into a rest area in an olive grove on the plain. The divisional engineers cleared part of the beach, and swimming parades varied the routine of daily maintenance.

The advance was resumed on 14 Sep. 5 Recce went forward and found the coast road intact. As the Italians had been responsible for demolitions on this road, none had been carried out. Meeting no opposition, the recce advanced north at great speed. The two troops under Capt. Amy accompanied them, but saw no action, as there was very little contact. By 18 Sep, the regiment was hopelessly behind 5 Div, which had made contact with U S. forces from Salerno bridgehead on 16 Sep. So at 0100 hrs 18 Sep the regiment reverted to command of 13 Corps. The wheeled vehicles moved at once to Praiaa Mare, a small seaside resort with a large and attractive beach. There they were joined by C sqn, which had been brought from Sicily in LCTs. The remainder of the tanks were brought up by LCT on the night 18-19 Sept, and the regiment formed a rest harbour at Praia. Maintenance was carried on, and swimming and sports were organized.

This concluded the Calabrian campaign. The regiment never fired a shot during the whole 15 days it lasted.

## V SOUTHERN ITALY

The early Fall of 1943 was a rather confused period in the Italian campaign. Fifth Army established itself at Salerno after a bitter struggle, and was working its way to Naples and the succession of river crossings beyond. Eighth Army was scattered over a very wide area. 13 Corps was emerging from Calabria, while Five Corps, having landed at Tarento was pushing its way up the east coast.

The Germans were resisting stubbornly in the west. But they lacked enough troops to hold all along the line, and had to let the Foggia airfields go almost by default. The campaign on the east coast moved swiftly until it reached the hills and mountains north of the Gargano Peninsula. Here the Germans put a brake on 8 Army's advance and brought a stubborn delaying action back to the Winter Line. In the mountainous sector in the centre, the battle went the same way.

After a quick withdrawal to Campobasso, the enemy stopped, and used each river line and commanding peak to give him more time to work on his Winter Line. As October went by, each day's delay meant much more than a few additional dugouts behind the Sangro. The weather began to break, and mud and sleet and snow rapidly added to the already formidable defenses.

The regiment's role on the western coast of Italy was finished, but several weeks were consumed in getting it moved to the east coast. On 27 Sept. all the wheeled vehicles left Praia and proceeded via Sapri, Lagonegro, Sala Consilina, Potenza, Gravina, and Spinazola to a harbour on the southern edge of the Foggia Plain near Minervino Murge. It was planned to concentrate 1 Cdn Armd Bde for an armoured battle on the Foggia Plain. As the Germans had abandoned the Plain by the time the wheeled vehicles reached its southern edge, this plan came to nothing. At Minervino, B Echelon joined the regiment, and was never again brigaded except for a short period during the Cassino battle.

The tanks were originally scheduled to arrive by sea at Tarento. As the advance was progressing rapidly, this was first changed to Barletta and finally to Manfredonia. On 30 Sept. A Echelon moved to Manfredonia, where it was to meet the tanks. As there were no naval authorities at Manfredonia, there was no information about the time of arrival, and a watch was kept for landing craft approaching the harbour.

On 6 Oct, as the landing craft

carrying the tanks rounded the heel of the Italian boot, a violent storm broke. One LCT was partially swamped, and had to put in at Brindisi to be pumped out. The main group of tanks arrived at Manfredonia 7 Oct, while the LCTs which had been caught in the storm came in on 11 Oct. Five of the tanks on one LCT had been immersed in salt water and had to be evacuated to workshop.

During this period, Lt-Col M. P. Johnston injured his knee in a jeep accident. He was evacuated out of the theatre. Major H. R. Schell took command of the regiment, and Major R. B. Kerr was appointed second in command. Capt H. F. F. Millen took command of A Sqn.

The regiment, less C Sqn, now concentrated near Lucera on the Foggia Plain. C Sqn on 11 Oct had moved off in support 15 Inf Bde to the area of San Croce di Migliano. No tank fighting resulted from this expedition. Landings were made up the coast at Termoli, and the enemy withdrew from the Larino area to deal with the threat in his rear. On one of the numerous recesses carried out into towns abandoned by the enemy, Major Smith picked up a number of allied offr PWs who had walked through the mountains from a northern Italian prison camp. They had been prisoners since Tobruk, and had never heard of a Sherman tank.

On 17 Oct, C Sqn was relieved of its responsibilities in this area, and moved off to rejoin the regiment over the lateral Larino-Campobasso. There were none of our troops forward of the rd. A demolition made it necessary to spend the night 17/18 Oct on the road, and the whole sqn complete with echelon bedded down ahead of the FDLs. At dusk on 18 Oct, the sqn harboured in the Campobasso area, losing one tank on a mine a few miles from the harbour.

In the meantime, the rest of the regiment had moved from Lucera to Campobasso. A warning order was received 15 Oct. On 16 Oct, the regiment was put on one hour's notice to relieve 14 C.A.R. in support of 1 Cdn Inf Div. Lt-Col Schell and the I.O. went to 1 Div HQ near Ielsi. The regiment moved up the Lucera-Vinchiaturo road on the next day, and by 18 Oct, was disposed as follows: RHQ in an open field area 5720, A Sqn under command 2 C.I.B. in a defensive position on the high ground south of the main rd and north of San Giuliano del Sannio, B Sqn under command 1 C.I.B. in the area of the T-rd 583276, C Sqn under command 3 C.I.B. behind A Sqn.

The Campobasso area was extremely



mountainous. The mountains, for a considerable distance up were intensively cultivated, and, in the frequent rainstorms, the ground, except where there were roads, became impassable to tracked vehicles. Campobasso itself was captured, and the enemy was holding the line of the Bifurno River, with outposts in the hills east of the river.

At Vinchiaturu was a crossing of 2 main roads, the highway from Benevento and Naples to the east coast at Termoli, and the main road from Foggia to Isernia. These 2 roads were 2-lane gravel, with some paving. While extremely tortuous because of the country through which they ran, they were good Italian mountain roads. The road from Campobasso to Vinchiaturu was dominated by a range of hills, east of the Bifurno, in which were situated the towns of Busso and Baranello. The road to Isernia wound down from Vinchiaturu cross-roads into a flat, narrow plain, overlooked from the east by our positions west of Vinchiaturu, from the north by German positions west of the Bifurno in the area of Spinete and Colle d'Anchise, and from the south and west by the Matese range, a high, jagged, snow-capped feature. This latter presented a great problem, as there were no roads through it, and consequently, it was not held by the Germans except for O.P.s. Their garrisons in the small foothill towns were easily forced out by any threat to the plain, which was their only avenue of escape. The Colle d'Anchise sector, however, contained a network of secondary roads, quite adequate to the maintenance of the relatively small bodies of troops required to hold such naturally advantageous positions. Immediately north of the Colle feature, and separated from it by a minor tributary of the Bifurno was a somewhat higher feature, overlooking the Bifurno. In this area was situated Castropignano, at the top of a bluff overlooking the Bifurno. Torella and Molise, two small mountain towns, stood on the highest point of this elevation. As 2 secondary roads ran from this feature to the Colle-Spinete area, it was necessary to secure Torella and Molise in order to protect the flank of any bridgehead over the Bifurno.

The country on both sides of the river was very close. In addition to the frequent crests and gulleys, there were numerous small villages, and all the land was cultivated. There were small patches of trees and bush, farmhouses, brickyards, and many other natural and artificial features which made the

terrain ideal for defense.

The roads were adequate for one-way traffic in dry weather, but the passage of heavy vehicles after rain quickly reduced them to a morass. Even in dry weather, any movement of tanks tore them to pieces at the numerous bends. Deployment off the roads was normally possible at some places. But the treacherous nature of the sodden ground made it an extremely risky business, as it was very common for a tank to bog down and belly helplessly, or throw a track in trying to extricate itself.

The towns were typically south Italian. Usually at the very top of a hill, they were densely built with one narrow but passable street. All the other streets were usually too narrow to be passable to vehicles, besides being, in many cases, steeply stepped. The houses themselves were of stone, strongly built with thick walls, and provided excellent protection from direct hits of normal field artillery weapons. Thus many of the key features were also natural fortifications.

The main German line of resistance was along the Bifurno River, which, running in a wide deep valley between ranges of hills, presented a formidable natural obstacle, despite the very minute amount of water which flowed in it. The main defensive position astride the Vinchiaturu-Isernia road was held by Pz. Div. 1 Bn 9 Pz. Gr. Regt. was south of the road, with II Bn. in immediate reserve in the Boiano area. North of the road was 67 PGR with I Bn extending approx to Colle d'Anchise, and II Bn. from there to the Div boundary. The boundary ran approx Baranello-Spinete. Reserves were situated in the area of Frosolone. Guarding the north flank on the Torella-Molise feature was 29 Pz. Gr. Div, a considerably weakened formation at the time. Its area extended to approximately the 40 Northing.

In support of the German Infantry were some tanks, all MK IVs. Because of the type of country, these did not operate in any great strength, and were used only on the Boiano plain and in the Colle d'Anchise area just to the north of it. Self-propelled guns from 26 Pz. Div. were also in the area, and normal anti-tk guns were in use, including the 27-20 PAK 41 squeeze gun. A fair amount of mining was encountered, mostly on roads and around demolitions.

More enemy artillery was used in this area than the Regiment had met heretofore. 26 Pz. Div. had approximately 29 guns concentrated behind Spinete and Boiano, while 29 Pz. Div.

mustered about 43, mostly in the Torella area. In addition, some 17 cms were used, largely for observed fire on roads and diversions. Because of the high ground held by the enemy, his observation was good, and his fire very accurate.

1 Cdn Div's task was to force a crossing of the Bifurno River, and continue the advance toward Isernia.

Before an attack could be mounted across the Bifurno, it was necessary to clear the enemy posts out of the Busso-Baranello area. At 0830 hrs on 18 Oct, 2 troops of A Squadron moved off in support of 2 coys of the Seaforths. They first took pt 590 just north of Vinchiaturro, which then reached at 1120 hrs. Encountering no enemy here, they pushed on to pt 763, overlooking the Bifurno and Colle d'Anchise and dominating Baranello. Here the tks destroyed 2 German M.G. nests and an O.P., and consolidated for the night with the infantry. Supplies were brought up by carrier, and except for some mortaring, no great difficulty was encountered. These 2 troops remained here until 20 Oct without any further incidents, returning to the A Sqn area.

One troop B Sqn was detailed to support its infantry attack on Busso on 19 Oct. The troop never reached its objective. While going around a blow in the road southwest of Campobasso, one tank was disabled by a mine. The others tried to get on across country, but both threw tracks in the heavy going, and arrived too late to assist the infantry. Another troop of B Sqn supported an attack on San Stefano, a small village about 3 miles east of Castropignano. From a dominating hill, they shelled the town for 30 minutes, but, when the infantry went in, they found that the Germans had left during the night. They then occupied Colle Galluccio, a feature overlooking the Bifurno opposite Castropignano, and shelled enemy mortar positions in Castropignano. They remained opposite the town for 48 hrs.

The clearing of the Boiano plain began on 20 Oct. For three days previously, the town was softened up by Mitchells and fighterbombers. On 19 Oct, a coy of the Carleton and Yorks crossed the valley, and established itself on the high ground west of Guardiaregia. One troop under Lt Ecclestone was sent forward to observe from a saddle which overlooked the whole valley. His tanks had difficulty moving over the rocky ground, but got into position before dusk. Though no movement was seen, tank tracks were

observed leading from the high ground down toward the railway tracks.

In the afternoon of the next day, the sqn moved off with Lt Ecclestone's troop in the lead. Just as the plain was reached, one of his tanks developed mechanical trouble, and, as the sqn moved across the plain, another almost disappeared in a small bog. The sqn continued, led by Capt W. J. E. Simmons in a recce carrier, and reached the rolling ground just south of Guardiaregia at 1600 hrs.

Two troops moved forward to fire positions on the last natural spur overlooking Stazione di Guardiaregia, with the rest of the sqn hull down on the spurs to the rear. Contact had not yet been made with the Carleton and Yorks, but a report was received via 2 C.I.B. that they were being mortared heavily from the area of Stazione di Guardiaregia. The tanks engaged this area, and the mortaring ceased. This activity, however, caused the enemy to reply with heavy and accurate shell-fire on the tanks. The guns could not be located, but were believed to be behind the high ground near Boiano, and directed by OP's in the Matese Mountains. The shots coming over included some AP from enemy tanks or anti-tank guns. Just before last light, a tank or half-track was observed crossing the front at extreme range, and engaged, with no noticeable results. After dusk, the sqn drew back to a sheltered harbour behind the north-east spur of the Matese Massif.

Late that night, supply carriers accompanied by the LAD recovery tank arrived. The route up to the tanks was so rough that carriers several times turned on their sides, and had to be unloaded and righted by the recovery tank. But the sqn was replenished, and, the next night, SSM Haines of C Sqn found a route for trucks, and set about building up a dump.

The tanks spent the next day in the same position, engaging likely targets. Always, their fire provoked a reply. This day, the enemy began to use an exceptionally heavy high-trajectory gun, firing from the Boiano area. It created shellholes 4 to 5 ft deep and 8 ft in diameter. At 1615 hrs, German tanks were observed in a farmyard about 2000 yds west of Staz. di Guardiaregia. They were engaged and at 1645 hrs, they withdrew.

During this time, the Carleton and Yorks, were working forward toward Boiano. The ground was too rough to permit tanks to move in their support. As the infantry moved in on Campochiaro, however, Capt A. B. Whitelaw with one troop under Lt. Ecclestone

moved off on 22 Oct, covered by the early morning mists. They reached a position south of Compochiaro and immediately below the town. Capt W. J. E. Simmons, with the help of a friendly native who showed him a covered approach, entered the town and made contact with the Carleton and Yorks. The rest of the sqn remained in their old fire position, engaging targets some of which were pointed out to them by a German deserter who wandered into the lines.

The tanks moved up again to these fire positions on 23 Oct and remained there under spasmodic shell-fire until noon. Major Smith then decided to move the sqn out to the cemetery northeast of Campochiaro, hoping to be able to support A Sqn who had started an attack across the Bifurno on Colle d'Anchise. The four tanks already in the Campochiaro area covered the rest across the open ground. On arrival in covered positions, the sqn was heavily shelled, and AP was fired at the tanks from the right flank. At dusk, the sqn laagered in an open field, and supplies came up by truck.

The following day, Major Smith decided to manoeuvre in the plain to try to divert enemy attention from the Colle d'Anchise operations. Covered by two troops on the high ground south of Campochiaro, he took half the squadron out on the plain. The Carleton and Yorks were observed crossing the high razor spur between Campochiaro and San Polo Matese, and, during the morning, they took the town.

At 1345 hrs, Lt Ecclestone and Capt Simmons, were making a recce on foot in hopes of waylaying the enemy tanks which had attacked A Sqn at Colle d'Anchise. Tanks tracks were found, and Lt Ecclestone followed these through a small gully. As he was crossing a stream, he was seriously wounded by a mine, and died of his injuries in a CCS in Campobasso.

Covered by the morning mists on 26 Oct, the sqn moved into Boiano, which had been occupied by the Carleton and Yorks without any fighting. Two troops were disposed astride the main road to Isernia, about 400 yds north of Boiano. One troop covered the centre of the town. The enemy continued to shell Boiano, but most of the fire was directed on the southern approaches and passed well over the heads of the tank crews.

The sqn was relieved by 12 C.A.R. on 29 Oct, and moved back to a regimental area near Campobasso.

The story must now turn back a few days to pick up the next sqn attack.

A Sqn moved off to a farming up

area on trig pt 763 at 1700 hrs 22 Oct, preparatory to an attack across the Bifurno on Colle d'Anchise. The Edmonton Regt were to attack under cover of darkness and secure a bridge-head which could allow a crossing to be bulldozed for the tanks upstream from Colle d'Anchise. As they pushed on, they were to leave guides to bring the tanks up to their positions. At 0200 hrs, the Edmonton's attack went in. They crossed the river, and at 0629 hrs Colle d'Anchise was reported clear. At 0643. A Sqn L.O. at 2 C.I.B. HQ reported skirmishes in the town, and that pts 681 and 670 north and east of the town were clear. Again, at 0720 hrs infantry reported Colle d'Anchise taken. Actually, the regiment had crossed north of the town, and entered it. But, as the Boiano-Colle d'Anchise road was not blocked, the enemy was able to counter attack, and retain possession of most of the town. Also, the whole area south of the town, which was served by this road, remained completely in German hands. It was in this area that the tank crossing was to be made.

At 0630 hours, 2 troops of A sqn under command of Capt. N. B. Baylay arrived at the ford. Under heavy MG and mortar fire, they crossed the river and proceeded up the bed to the point where the engineers were preparing an exit with a bulldozer. As the Germans still held undisputed possession of the west bank of the river, the engineers progressed very slowly with their task, and suffered extremely heavy casualties. The first tank was unable to cross until 0829 hours. No infantry guide could be found during the delay, but on orders of 2 C. I. B., the tanks pressed on toward Colle d'Anchise expecting a guide on the way. At 0840 hours, Capt. Baylay reported his position on a track south of Colle d'Anchise, about 1000 yards north of the river, and again asked for guides. The position and request were sent to 2 C. I. B. At 0858 hours, about 15 enemy infantry were encountered and disposed of. There was still no contact with the Edmonton's, and the tanks were being shelled, mortared and sniped. At 0940 hrs, a house was engaged. Enemy ran from it, and were machinegunned. 1 troop under Lieut. C. B. D. Jamieson was meeting German infantry in houses and haystacks and engaging them with success. At 1027 hours, an infantry patrol reported 2 enemy tanks moving northeast on the Boiano-Colle d'Anchise road, about halfway between Monteverde and Colle d'Anchise. Before this had been passed to A sqn, Lt.

Jamieson reported that it was no use to advance further without guides. At 1032 hours, Lt. Jamieson spotted a lone Canadian soldier crossing a field, but could not attract his attention. At 1100 hours, Edmontons reported positions which were all north of the town. At 1110 hours, an O. P. reported 2 German MK IV tanks moving southeast on the Monteverde-Spinete road in the area of Monteverde. 2 C. I. B. ordered these tanks bagged and at 1124 hours Capt. Baylay was ordered to divert from the town to trap the 2 tanks. There was still no contact with the infantry, but 2 C. I. B. reported there was nothing to worry about in the town.

At 1140 hours, Lt. Jamieson reported sighting a tank, but could not identify it. At 1203 he sighted a tank again, and saw men running north just south of Colle d'Anchise. At 1211 all trace of the tank was lost. At the same time, one tank in Lt. A. E. Armstrong's troop had its turret ring jammed by a direct mortar hit, and had to drop behind as it could not traverse its gun. At 1217 hours, Lt. Jamieson engaged an enemy vehicle which he could not see clearly enough either to identify or observe results. At 1229, the hunt for the German tanks was abandoned and the detachment was ordered to return to its original line of advance and continue on to establish contact with the Edmontons.

At 1236, Lt. Armstrong reported firing 5-600 yards to his front. The tanks now proceeded north up the track they had originally taken toward Colle d'Anchise, under shell and mortar fire. As they neared the track junction at 431225, they were ambushed by 2 MK IVs hidden behind buildings around the intersection. Lt. Jamieson's tank, his Sgt's tank right behind him, and Lt. Armstrong's tank were hit and disabled, 2 of the vehicles brewing up. The driver and co-driver of Lt. Jamieson's tank were killed by shots through the front plates, while Lt. Armstrong and 4 men were wounded. As the crews of the disabled Shermans crawled out of the area through a ditch, one was killed by an anti-personnel mine. The rest of the tanks shelled the area from which the firing had come, and smoke was laid to cover the evacuation. A self-propelled gun was destroyed.

At 1410, 2 C. I. B. reported everything going according to plan on the right flank, where the RCR were passing through to Spinete, with one troop A Sqn under Lt. J. E. Slinger in support. At 1424, 2 C. I. B. reported that infantry in Colle d'Anchise had been

beaten back off the high ground, by a counter-attack with tanks. At 1525, the infantry called for assistance north of the town, but the remaining tanks in the area had bogged down and thrown tracks, and could not move. Capt. Baylay had dismounted to make a reconnaissance and, cut off from his tank by German fire, was now missing. He eventually managed to make his way on foot back to the river. The wooded area south of Colle d'Anchise was full of Germans who had infiltrated into it from the direction of Boiano, and Capt. Baylay, at 1548, was ordered to contact the C. O. of the Carleton and Yorks to try to clean the area out. As Capt. Baylay was missing at the time, the order was not carried out.

At 1533, Major H. F. Millen started the rest of A Sqn, less Lt Slinger's troop, across the river to try to retrieve the situation. Lt Slinger was unable to contact the RCR, who took Spinete without difficulty, and this troop remained on pt. 763 for the night.

At 1715, as darkness was beginning to fall, Major Millen again asked for guides, and 2 C.I.B. replied that they were being attended to. At 1733, guides were again requested, and at dusk, Major Millen harboured his tanks in a tight laager south of Colle d'Anchise, having been unable to make contact with the infantry. Germans were all about recovering their damaged vehicles and dead. It was impossible to leave the tanks because of snipers, and no physical contact was made with the infantry all night. Although most of the crews of Lt D. Shirriff's tanks could see enemy patrols at the alarming range of 40 feet, no exchange of fire was made.

R/T could not be used, as the enemy was so close that the voice of the speaker would have been heard. At 2230 hrs, contact was re-established with A Sqn by W/T after a 4-hr silence. Major Millen gave his position as "up the tank tracks, about one mile from the river". This was passed to 2 C.I.B., but infantry patrols failed to contact the tank during the night.

On 24 Oct 43, the situation around Colle d'Anchise was completely cleared up. The Germans, after removing their dead and their damaged vehicles, evacuated the Colle-Spinete area, the RCR were established in Spinete, and at first light A Sqn's tanks started off, and met infantry patrols near Colle d'Anchise.

At 1800 hrs, RHQ moved to 583276.

On 25 Oct 43, the good weather which had so far prevailed, ended, and showers fell, rapidly making cross-country tank operation out of the question.



A Sqn 2 troops forward from Colle d'Anchise to Spinete to take up defensive positions in front of the latter town pending the arrival of anti-tank guns, which had been bogged down in the heavy going. Shelling was desultory in the area as the German guns were busy elsewhere.

On 26 Oct, the LAD and fitters commenced recovery activities on A squadron's tanks, most of which had thrown tracks in the heavy going. On 28 Oct, the squadron was released by 2 C.I.B. and moved back to a regimental concentration area.

With the establishment of a bridgehead over the Bifurno, it became necessary to take Torella and Molise as an anchor for the right flank. On 24 Oct, B Sqn moved into a hide on the east bank of the Bifurno opposite Castropignano, and remained concealed there throughout the day, while the 48th Highlanders crossed the river and occupied Castropignano. In the late afternoon, B Sqn, carrying a battery of Airborne 75-mm guns with their crews, crossed the river. The going was extremely difficult, the crossing was under the fire of 17-cm guns firing from beyond the range of our own artillery, and it was midnight before the tanks reached Castropignano.

Plans were laid during the night for a 2-coy attack by the 48th Highlanders supported by 2 troops of B Sqn. The attack was to go in against Torella along the axis of the Castropignano-Torella road. Maj D. H. Lander commanded the two forward troops (Lts W. H. Ellis and K. D. McCord). The ground was rolling, giving the tanks opportunity to manoeuvre, and the advance progressed without incident until the last bound, about 1200 yds south of Torella, was reached at mid-morning. Here, the infantry was held up by heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The tanks took up covered fire positions, and shelled Torella and Molise. It was decided to remain on this bound, and attack again at last light. While directing a shoot from outside his tank, Major Lander was wounded by shrapnel from a shell which burst near him. Capt A. B. Harrison assumed temporary command.

When darkness fell, the 48th Highlanders put in a successful attack, and cleared the objective. The tanks withdrew to a rear rally. The next day, they moved up into position for a counter-attack role. On 28 Oct, Maj D. H. McIndoe, formerly Adjt of 14 CAR took over command of B Sqn. The squadron remained across the river doing nothing until 7 Nov, when it was released.

As each squadron was relieved, it

moved back to a regimental concentration area, around Casa Barone, about 4 miles from Compobasso. Here the regiment was strung out along a road running on a ridge. Maintenance was carried out, and trips were run to Campobasso, which was organized as a leave centre by auxiliary services.

On 6 Nov, C Sqn was warned to be ready to move in support of 3 C.I.B. This brigade was moving toward Carovili, Castiglione and Agnone to clear the central part of the Isernia-Vasto road. Demolitions and weather, however, made it impossible to move tanks into the area, and the move was cancelled on 9 Nov.

Brigadier Wyman believed that the brigade would remain inactive in this area all winter. Plans were made for winter billets, and a recce of Isernia was made. While large enough, this town was found unsuitable because of extensive bomb damage. An open air harbour near Stazione de Sepino was next laid out. The move into this area was scheduled for 0700 hrs 15 Sep. But at the last moment, this move was cancelled. Plans were hurriedly revised, and the brigade prepared to move to the East coast.

## VI - THE MORO AND ORTONA

On 16 Nov., the regiment was ordered to move to an area west of Termoli at 1830 hrs., 17 Nov. The brigade, less 12 CAR, was moving under command of V Corps.

The tanks moved by transporter at 1830 hours 17 Nov. 43, the wheels at 2030. Rain was falling, and the road was so slippery that, on the steep mountain grades, the tanks had to off-load, and some helped push the transporters up the hills. Harboring in an olive grove west of Termoli was completed by 2030 hours 18 Oct. The area was extremely muddy and bare of shelter. Movies were shown and recreational parades to Termoli were organized. As it rained the greater part of the time, the stay in this harbour was was not a pleasant one. It lasted until 30 Nov., and the regiment was on one hour's notice to move at all times after 18 Nov.

On 23 Nov. the regiment was visited by Col. Halston, Minister of National Defense. He talked to officers and men, and gave a short speech in which he emphasized that the end of the war was still far distant.

The campaign in Italy had by now, come almost to a standstill. All across the peninsula, the Germans were holding on their Winter Line. This began behind the Sangro on the east coast, and followed that river to Castel di-

Sangro in the midst of the Appenines. Thence it ran to the Cassino position, down the Gari River, to where its junction with the Liri formed the Gargigliano, and down the Gargigliano to the sea. Fifth Army's advance on the coast was halted at the Gargigliano. The task of breaking through the Cassino position into the Liri Valley was formidable at any time, and the prevailing winter weather made it look impossible. There was obviously no future in fighting in the snows of the Central Appenines. So Eighth Army was now to make the main effort on the east coast.

Montgomery's plan was to break the Winter Line along the coast, and follow rapidly up to Pescara. Once at Pescara, the army was to push west through the mountains along the Pescara-Rome motor road. In the General's words "we will now hit the enemy a colossal crack."

Three divisions made the assault on the Sangro. 78 Div. was on the coast, 8 Indian in the centre, on the New Zealand Division toward the mountains. In reserve was 1 Cdn. Div., 1 Cdn. Armd. Bde. was in corps reserve, but not to be committed without orders from the Army Commander. It was to be used to exploit any breakthrough, and was expected to relieve 4 Armd. Bde. when the advance reached San Vito Chietino.

The move from Termoli took place on 30 Nov. B Echelon moved at 0345 hours, the rest of the regiment at 0800 hours. The tanks were not permitted on the road, and had to follow a tank track, running cross-country beside the road. Despite considerable difficulty on this wet and uneven route, the whole regiment was harboured north of Scerni by 2000 hours.

On 30 Nov., the Sangro crossing and the capture of Fossacesia Ridge was completed. The scattered elements of the garrison which had held the Sangro positions were in disordered flight northwards, and 78 Div. was pursuing them closely. On 1 Dec., therefore, the regiment less B Echelon, moved via Torina di Sangro to a harbour just south of the river, between the main road and the sea. Harboursing was complete at 1500 hours.

Recce parties left long before first light the next morning to find a harbour on the lateral road running northeast from Mozzagrogna to Rocca San Giovanni. The parties were somewhat surprised to find that the area was in the FDLs of 8 Ind. Div. At 0630 hours, the main column moved. The wheels crossed the Sangro by Vic

Bridge, while the tanks forded the river just downstream from the bridge. As the head of the column reached Mozzagrogna, a formation of German fighter-bombers attacked it, causing 2 minor casualties and some vehicle damage. By 1000 hours, the regiment was harboured in an olive grove off the lateral. There was considerable enemy air activity during the day, and some light shelling around the harbour, none of which caused any damage. The next day, the regiment moved into a harbour on the secondary road from San Vito to Lanciano, about 3 miles north-east of Lanciano.

By 6 Dec, 78 Div had reached the Moro river, the next considerable obstacle after the Sangro. As 78 Div was tired after the Sangro assault, 1 Cdn Div was brought up to take over. The regiment was put on one hour's notice to move in support of 1 Cdn Div. Lt-Col Schell left at 0830 hrs to recce the crossings of the Moro. At 1300 hrs, the regiment came under command 4 Br Armd Bde as reserve regiment in a projected attack across the Moro, and at 0500 hrs the next morning Lt-Col Schell left for HQ 4 Armd Bde. The regiment, with A Echelon, moved at 1100 hrs through S. Vito to a harbour on the ridge between San Vito and San Leonardo. This ridge separated the Moro and Foldrino Rivers, and was under direct observation and fire from the enemy positions around San Leonardo. During the three days the regiment remained here, it was subjected to frequent and accurate shelling, and suffered several casualties, including three officers. In addition, one tank was brewed up by a shell which landed on an open hatch.

Tank operations across the Moro were largely conditioned by the nature of the terrain. The 1 Cdn Div sector, ran in a deep wide valley, with steep sides, which were cultivated for the most part. The gravelly bottom of the river itself contained very little water during December. The main coast road, a good paved highway, was unusable for a crossing because quicksand prevented the building of a bridge. The crossing which had to be used was that on the S. Vito—S. Leonardo road. This was a good, unpaved road, wide enough for 2-way traffic. At S. Leonardo where it crossed the river, it descended the south bank by a series of 3 steps, doubling back on itself each time in a hairpin curve. This whole sector was under shellfire, particularly the highest hairpin curve which could be observed directly from a German OP at Villa Roatti, and was constantly being hit

squarely by shells, acquiring the name of "The Devil's Elbow". Across the river, the road climbed back up to S. Leonardo by another series of 3 steps and entered S. Leonardo at a cross-roads with a stone cross in the middle of the street. It then ran through the town and northwest for about 3000 yds where it crossed the Ortona-Orsogna lateral and continued on to Villa Grande and Tollo. The crossing came to be known as "Chit House Crossing".

Beyond the bluffs overlooking the Moro, the ground ran north fairly flat except by the sea until it almost reached the lateral. On the coast, for about a mile inland, it was hilly and cut by gullies. The flat inland sector ended just southeast of the lateral in a steep-sided gully, running parallel to the road. The road itself ran on a slight but well-defined ridge overlooking the whole area as far as the Moro. Because of the wet weather, this gully was impassable to tanks except where it was crossed by tracks or roads.

The flat ground was intensively cultivated, with olive groves and some vineyards, and was dotted with farm houses of varying sizes. Like all Italian farmhouses, these made excellent natural defensive positions.

This flat area was bounded to the south by a small tributary of the Moro, running in another deep and steep-sided gully which extended to within half a mile of the one parallel to the lateral.

There were three main exits from S. Leonardo. First was the main road to Tollo. Second, a track running along the north bank of the Moro to the coast road. The third was a road known as Lager track which crossed the Ortona gully by a small culvert and met the main lateral about 2000 yds southwest of Casa Berardi. This track passed through a group of houses (Villa Licini) situated on a small knoll which gave excellent observation north to the Ortona lateral.

The Germans held the line of the Moro with 90 PG Div, a reformation of the old 90 Lt. Div. which had fought in Africa. This was a fresh Div replacing 65 Inf Div which had been badly cut up on the Sangro. Elements of 65 Div remained in the area for some days. When 90 PG was driven back to a new line along the Ortona lateral, 1 Para Div, a crack formation of picked fighters took over.

The weather during the whole of December and early January was wet. The soft ground soaked with rain made the movement even of tracked vehicles across country most difficult, and gave a further advantage to the defenders

by canalizing avenues of approach to their positions and by slowing down movement of vehicles and deployments of guns. Many more tanks were put out of action by the soft ground than were disabled by any other means.

German infantry was liberally supported by artillery, in much greater quantity than had ever before been seen by Eighth Army. All the crossings, OPs, harbour areas, etc. were registered and received regular and accurate attention. In addition mortars of all calibers were used on a heavy scale, and nebelwerfers supported the enemy.

German tanks mostly Mk IV specials were used on a scale larger than had been seen heretofore. They were employed defensively in an anti-tank role, usually from positions behind farmhouses, haystacks, etc. Also, the Ortona lateral was used as a run, and the tanks moved up and down this road freely, having a great advantage in mobility over our tanks, approaching them on narrow tracks and soggy ground. The usual range of German anti-tank weapons was also present, including a profusion of towed 75 mm guns. There was also a goodly number of SPs, but these were usually used in an artillery and not an anti-tank role. Anti-tank mines were also used very liberally.

The German line between the Maiellas and the sea was based, at its inland end on the strong natural fortress of Guardiagrele. Thence it ran to Orsogna and down the Moro to the sea. It was switched back twice, hinged on the Guardiagrele-Orsogna position. First to Arielli and the Ortona lateral, and finally to the line of the Arielli River.

Previous probing across the Moro had established the fact that the enemy was very determined to hold the line of the river. The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment had established an extremely tenuous bridgehead along the coast road, but the lack of a suitable bridging site robbed this foothold of most of its significance. It was now decided to assault across the river in brigade strength (1 Cdn Inf Bde) and establish a firm bridgehead. The RCR were to cross at the coast road, pass through the HPER positions, and push west and south toward San Leonardo. Later, the 48th Highlanders were to cross over to the high ground west of San Leonardo, the La Torre feature. When the bridgehead was established and San Leonardo secured, 2 C.I.B. was to cross the river and, supported by the 14th Regiment, secure the cross-roads where the San Leonardo — Tollo road crossed the Ortona lateral. The 11th Regiment was to cross

to San Leonardo as soon as possible, prepared to exploit to Tollo and Ortona. Priorities for the crossing were: Combat team of 14 CAR and 1 Coy Seaforths, remainder of 14 CAR, 11 CAR, infantry anti-tank guns. The actual battle never bore much resemblance to this plan.

The assault went in at 1630 hrs 8 Dec, preceded by tremendous artillery concentrations. The regiment was put on notice to move on receipt of the code word GROG, which was expected at about 0700 hrs 9 Dec. At last light, trucks filled with ligs lined up on the road by the regiment's harbour, and a bulldozer went down into the Moro Valley. All night the engineers worked making a corduroy road across the almost dry stream bed, harassed by machine gun, mortar and shell-fire, and at 0700 hrs, the crossing was ready for use.

Though the river was no longer an obstacle, the enemy still barred the way across it. San Leonardo had not been taken, and the bridgehead was extremely shaky. A squadron of 14 CAR under Major E. A. C. Amy crossed the river and started to clear the village. At 1430, C Sqn was ordered to cross the river. Major Smith arrived in the Moro Valley to find the Calgary Regiment strung out in line along the road which wound up to San Leonardo. As there was no room beyond the river, he stayed lined up on the road south of it. In the evening, however, tanks began to get through town, and C Sqn got 4 tanks forward to relieve Major Amy in an olive grove west of San Leonardo, between Lager track and the east-west gully. The rest of the squadron, under Capt. A. B. Whitelaw, crossed the river but remained on the road south of the town. At 2400 hrs, the squadron was placed under command 14 CAR.

Though forward movement was still blocked, brigade ordered another squadron across the river at 2000 hrs. A Sqn crossed at 2115 and harboured just across the river, to the left of the road.

The next morning, at 0715 hrs, C Sqn got the rest of their tanks up into the position west of San Leonardo, but a projected move up Lager Track was postponed.

The rest of the regiment prepared to move across the river at 0730 hrs, and at 0830 hrs, RHQ and B Sqn harboured off the road south of San Leonardo to await the end of the traffic jam in the village. In getting off the road, one of the recovery tanks hit a mine, while the other was disabled shortly afterwards when a mortar shell scored a direct hit on its sprocket. Capt. Alexander, the RMO, was wounded by a splin-

ter from a mortar and evacuated that night. Capt R. C. Mellow (RCAMC) replaced him.

C Sqn reverted to command of the regiment at 1530 hrs. A few enemy in the west part of the olive grove were mopped up, and the whole regiment moved into the area. Major Smith asked permission to move to the top of a ridge in front of Berardi but was ordered to consolidate on the low ground. San Leonardo and the harbour received a very thorough pasting from the enemy's guns and mortars until dark, and then intermittently throughout the night.

On the morning of 11 Dec, C Sqn supported a company of the Seaforths onto the ridge below Berardi. The mud made it impossible to get the tanks up to the ridge, and a counter-attack in battalion strength forced the Seaforths to withdraw at 1500 hrs. They immediately tried to re-establish the position, but failed. After dark, enemy activity could be heard on the ridge, and C Sqn withdrew into a tight lager east of Villa Licini.

This same day, 2 troops of A Sqn with Major H.F.F. Millen in command set out to join a company of the Carleton and Yorks on the coast road. They advanced up the road in very heavy going and dug in for the night about 700 yds beyond the intersection of the coast road with the S. Leonardo track. The following day, they continued up the road to a feature overlooking Ortona and about 1200 yds south of it. Here, blows in the road made further progress impossible, so the troops stopped and the infantry dug in.

At midnight 11/12 Dec, B Sqn was put on 30 minutes notice to support the West Nova Scotia Regiment in an attack northwest from the Tollo road, through Casa Berardi, to cut the road north of the lateral at a point where it looped sharply across a river. But no further action developed for the regiment on 12 Dec.

The WNSR, supported by B Sqn, attacked toward Berardi at 1000 hrs on the 13th. Good progress was made at first, through very close country. As they approached the Villa Licini area, they encountered four German tanks, 3 Mk IV Specials and one Mk IV, clustered around a farmhouse. The crews were asleep inside their tanks, with no guard out. Lt F. P. Clarke's troop first sighted them at a range of under 50 yds. They destroyed 2 with AP, while the infantry climbed aboard the other 2 and captured them.

The squadron continued along the high ground paralleling the lateral. As they reached a point just across the gully from Berardi, they met heavy



enemy fire. It proved impossible to get tanks across the gully to Berardi, and the infantry were unable to get across alone. The tanks withdrew to a position just west of the Tollo road where they remained under heavy shelling, sniping and mortaring. Six of the squadron's tanks were now bogged down and out of action, so the remainder of A Sqn under Capt Baylay was sent up to strengthen the position.

In the afternoon, 392 Bty, 98 Fd Regt came in support of the regiment, and Major Peile moved to RHQ near San Leonardo.

The frontal attack on Berardi was now stalled by the gully, and by enemy fire. A new attempt to break the German hold on the Ortona lateral was made in the afternoon. At 1500 hrs, C Sqn, consisting of only 4 tanks, accompanied by C Coy of the Seaforth's, depleted to 30 all ranks by its fighting on the ridge, started up Lager track. They crossed the gully the lateral. It was apparent that this move caught the enemy unprepared. As they moved along the lateral behind the German positions, enemy troops ran out of houses and strong points. Two enemy tanks were knocked out, and 78 prisoners were taken, including 4 officers. Our troops did not suffer a casualty. The force was too small to attack Berardi, and at dusk they were ordered to return. Moving back in the dark, 2 tanks bogged down, and Major Smith ordered them burned to avoid their capture.

The success of this attack encouraged 1 Div. to try the same manoeuvre in force the next day. All night, recovery elements worked at debogging C Sqn's tanks, and by morning, Major Smith had 7 fit tanks. At 0700 hrs, these 7 tanks started off again up Lager Track with a company of the Royal 22nd Regiment under Capt Paul Triquet. The leading tank of C Sqn was knocked out after crossing the culvert. A Mark III hidden behind a barn on the left of the track destroyed it with a round of HE at a range of 100 yds. The Mark III was, in turn, destroyed. There were obviously more enemy tanks in the area, and Major Smith settled down behind the ridge to outwait them. After 2 hours, as Mark IV showed itself on the latera I, east of the track junction, and was destroyed. Another, north of the road, was pierced, and then a second one on the road. A fourth tank, hidden northwest of the track junction, escaped to the north. The way to the lateral was now clear, and the squadron pushed on. The 6 tanks with the infantry made good progress until the T-road about 500

yds southwest of Berardi was reached. Here the opposition became savage. German paratroopers were dug in with tanks, self-propelled guns and Spandous around Casa Berardi and in the neighbouring gullies. They were supported by intense artillery and mortar fire. The infantry were unable to make any headway against this opposition, and another of our tanks was disabled, this time by a hit on the track. This tank remained out in no-man's land for 3 days. Though its ammunition was exhausted, the crew stayed with it for the whole time. They were unable to leave the tank, as the enemy was so close.

A Mark IV Special now attacked straight down the lateral from the northeast. Smoke was laid on the road to blind it, and a Sherman fired straight down the road through the smoke, brewing up the Mk IV on the third shot without having been able to see it. Another Mk IV Special was destroyed in an olive grove off the road, at a range of about 600 yds, and a third in Berardi. A truck was also hit near Berardi. During this engagement, Lt S. C. Campbell was fatally wounded when a mortar shell landed on his turret, and Lt D. MacGregor received a scalp wound when a sniper's bullet penetrated his steel helmet.

Throughout the day, enemy tank gunnery was extremely inaccurate. Had their shooting from concealed defensive positions been even fair, C Sqn's losses would have been very high. Our gunners, on the other hand, were deadly, rarely wasting a round.

C Sqn was now reduced to only four fighting tanks. Major Smith and Lt Harrod were the only tank officers left at Berardi. It was impossible to take Berardi before dark, and the infantry and tanks established a defensive position about 200 yds southwest of the buildings. Just after dark, 2 MK IV tanks managed to slip past up the lateral from the southwest, and retire to the safety of Ortona. This was the last German traffic over the road, which was now definitely cut.

Infantry casualties in the attack had been so high that it was impossible to send back stretcher bearers with the wounded, as every man was needed to fight. The position was cut off and inaccessible on the night of 14/15 Dec. and the wounded remained in a large building until a mule train got up the following night and took the more serious cases out. No supplies could be sent to the tanks, which had expended large quantities of ammunition. This situation was eased somewhat by re-

moving all the ammo from the tank which had been disabled earlier in the day.

B Sqn remained east of Berardi, but five of their tanks under Capt L. I. Knowles were sent to Villa Licini to prevent any successful counter-attack from the left flank, where the enemy still held Villa Jubati in strength.

A Sqn less 2 troops, remained on the coast road, in very close proximity to the Germans. It was impossible to leave the tanks in daylight, and at night enemy machine guns, set on fixed lines, opened up on the tanks whenever the Germans heard sounds which indicated movement around the vehicles. This made supply a most difficult problem.

The next day, 15 Dec, was the third fine day in succession. Berardi was quiet in the morning, the Germans having apparently drawn back, but, about noon, they returned to the area. Shelling intensified, and at 1500 hrs, 200 paratroopers counter-attacked, supported by tanks. The attack lasted about 45 minutes. C Sqn knocked out one Mk IV Special. The Royal 22nd Regiment was forced to withdraw its positions about 300 yds. Finally, the attack was crippled by fire from 98 Fd Regt. Firing on directions given by Major Smith to Major Pelle at RHQ, they put 1400 rounds of 105 dead on the counter-attacking force within 15 minutes. At 1545, the force withdrew, badly mauled.

Seven tanks under Capt. N. B. Baylay were warned to support the Carleton and York Regiment in an attack on the main crossroad. But, while the Germans held Berardi, no attack could hope to succeed, so nothing materialized.

C Sqn. was still cut off at Berardi, it was impossible to get normal supply vehicles through, and there was no hope that mules could bring supplies in sufficient quantities. After two days of fierce fighting, the sqn. was very low on ammunition. At 2000 hrs., Capt. L. I. Knowles arrived at RHQ to discuss plans for getting supplies in to C sqn. It was decided to move his tanks up under cover of darkness, leaving out each co-driver, and filling the tanks with ammunition. In addition, one tank which had a defective wireless set was completely stripped, loaded with supplies, and sent with only a driver and crew commander. The seven B sqn tanks under Capt. Baylay took over the V. Licini position. Thus C Sqn. would be both replenished and reinforced.

During the day, A and B sqns re-

mained where they were, still under fire, but otherwise quiet.

At midnight 15/16 Dec., Capt. Knowles with seven tanks, including the one stripped down, left V. Licini for C sqn's Berardi position. He arrived safely at 0400 hours, and C sqn was now supplied with ammo and reinforced by 6 fresh tanks. It was now possible to undertake offensive action, and Capt. Knowles operated all day in the area of the bridge at 320137. This was still intact, and the tanks concentrated on trying to prevent the Germans from blowing it. They shot up numbers of enemy moving in the valley near the bridge, and successfully engaged German MT in the area. Despite the threat to their flanks and rear, the Germans remained in Berardi.

A sqn. 44 RTR (Major Whitaker) came under command of the regiment, and moved into the San Leonardo harbour. In the evening, they took over flank protection and moved as far as the cross-roads west of the Villa Licini, but were unable to follow Lager track to the lateral, as the route was covered by anti-tank guns firing from the area east of Caldari Station. They lost one tank to these guns.

A sqn less 2 troops returned from the coast road, and B sqn. less 2 troops from the area east of Berardi. They moved back into the S. Leonardo harbour, and commenced refitting immediately.

17 Dec. was another clear, cool day. At Berardi, Capt. Knowles continued operating in the area of the bridge, and shot up some enemy infantry. In the afternoon, he was wounded by a sniper and evacuated. Shelling in the Berardi area caused some casualties. One tank struck a mine and lost a track. Attempted recovery proved fruitless, and one man was killed by a sniper as he tried to unfasten the towing cables.

B sqn sent 4 tanks under Capt. Stafford to clear out snipers along the Tollo road. The task was completed successfully, but Capt. Stafford was wounded and evacuated. Major Whitaker, O. C. A sqn. 44 RTR was killed by a shell during the afternoon.

On 18 Dec., the skies began to cloud up. C sqn. remained in the Berardi area. 12 CAR passed through, supporting 2 C. I. B. in an attack toward the main cross-roads and northeast to Ortona. The cross-roads was taken, and some ground northeast of it was consolidated against fierce and stubborn resistance.

The rest of the regiment remained at rest in the S. Leonardo harbour, but

experienced some heavy shelling. The entrance to S. Leonardo was still on the enemy D. F. list, and received frequent attention from their guns.

On 14 Dec., the 2 C. I. B. attack approached Ortona. C sqn's task was now complete, and they returned to S. Leonardo. The whole regiment was now concentrated here, engaged in rest and maintenance. They remained until 23 Dec. On 20 Dec., Lt.-Col. Angle of the BCDs arrived with his I. O. and recce officer to observe and discuss the regiment's experience in action. During this period, 2 C. I. B. group, with 12 CAR, was fighting its way house by house through the streets of Ortona.

An O Group was held at 1800 hours, 22 Dec. The street fighting in Ortona was slow and costly, and an attempt was now to be made to outflank and cut off the town from the west and northwest. The country to the west and northwest of Ortona was even closer than the ground the regiment had fought over south of the town. It was bounded on the west by a small stream, deeply sunk into the ground, and emptying into the Adriatic at Torre Mucchia, better known from a symbol on the map as "Trig Pt. 59." On the east was the coast north of Ortona. As the coast ran northeast and the stream due north, the area came to a point at Trig Pt. 59. The coast road followed the line of the Adriatic shore on the high ground just back of it. About 2 miles northwest of Ortona, a good gravel road branched west running straight to the small stream previously described, which it crossed by a ford, and ran thence to Tollo. A few small dirt tracks ran through the area, by means of which it was possible to get from the S. Leonardo-Tollo road to the road serving Tollo across the ford, at a point midway between the coast road and the ford.

Vineyards covered most of the ground. These vineyards were obstacles to tanks as the grape vines were trained on wires which were supported by light concrete posts. The tangle of wires made movement very slow, and there was a constant possibility of having the suspension fouled by wires. The vineyards also offered excellent cover for enemy infantry.

The ground had been cultivated for centuries, and the frequent rains reduced it to a morass, where a tank could not move. Another tank regiment had already refused to go through this area on the grounds that it was impassable.

The plan was as follows: On 23 Dec., HPER was to attack the track junc-

tion at 311140. A sqn. in support to proceed to this objective when sappers cleared the track from the S. Leonardo Tollo road. Upon arrival, a few tanks would be sent north toward ring contour 100, 3016, to test the ground. In the second phase, the 48th Highlanders was in support 11 CAR less A sqn. would pass through and seize ring contour 100. In the third phase, the RCR to pass through the 48th Highlanders, picking up 11 CAR on the way and cut the coast road. One section of sappers was attached to each squadron for the operation.

The operation started on 23 Dec. as planned. At 1000 hours, HPER had reached first objective and A sqn. moved up. Lt. A. W. Hawkins took his tank out to test the ground north of the objective, and at 1100 hours, while trying to cross a gully not shown on the map, he struck a mine. As the gully was covered by machine-gun fire, a path could not be swept across it in daylight.

At noon, the rest of the regiment moved up to an area southwest of the lateral, about 1000 yards southwest of Berardi.

At 1500 hours, as no path for tanks could be found across the gully, the 48th Highlanders passed through without tanks, and reached their objective, ring contour 100, under cover of darkness.

Attempts to sweep the gully during the night 23/24 Dec. failed, owing to enemy patrols and shelling. The HPER area was infiltrated by paratroops during the night, and considerable sniping went on. The 48th Highlanders could not be reached in daylight. They had bypassed numbers of enemy in the darkness, and these remained in houses behind the battalion. Attempts to move tanks into position failed. As it appeared impossible to move on, and as the position of both battalions was rendered precarious because their right flanks were in the air, the RCR moved in on the right flank of the HPER.

Christmas Day was cloudy, cool and damp, and marked by some very successful fighting. At 1300 hours, two troops of A sqn. under Capt. N. B. Baylay reached the 48th Highlanders. They were doubly welcome, as they brought the battalion's Christmas dinner with them. A combined attack was begun immediately on buildings in the area which sheltered enemy Spandaus and snipers. As the Germans had no anti-tank defenses in this area, having believed that it was impossible to use tanks in such country, the mopping up was a huge success. Numerous para-



troopers were killed, and approximately 30, including an officer, taken prisoner.

At the same time, another troop of A Sqn under Lt. W. D. Shirriff moved off to join the RCR. Movement was possible only along a single track, and when the second tank bogged, blocking the track, Lt Shirriff had to go on alone in his tank. He reached the RCR and supported their mopping up operations, shooting up several defended buildings.

On 26 Dec, A Sqn moved up to the 48th Highlander's area complete. Two troops of B Sqn continued, mopping up the HPER area, and the enemy suffered further casualties. Christmas trees and propaganda messages from the enemy were found in some of the houses.

In the evening, Capt. W. J. E. Simmons went as liaison officer to the Royal West Kends of 8 Ind Div, on the left flank. The RWKs planned an attack on 27 Dec to seize the high ground 1000 yds south of Villa San Nicola, and A Sqn was detailed to support them by fire from the east bank of the gully. In the evening, the B Sqn troops with the HPER were released, and A Sqn sent one troop back to the regimental area. The RWK attack went in on 27 Dec. A Sqn moved to the east bank of the gully to support them, and could find no targets at first, but were greeted by enemy shell-fire. At 1100 hrs, Lt Hawkins demolished the church tower south of Villa S. Nicola, which was being used by the enemy as an O.P.

At 1300 hrs, A Sqn and one coy of the 48th Highlanders moved up to the ford on the lateral to Tollo. They reached it without opposition, and during the evening, contact was lost all along the divisional front.

The Carleton and Yorks, supported by B Sqn, set off for the Tollo lateral at 0800 hrs 28 Dec. They met no opposition, and cut the lateral about half way between the coast road and the ford. They then turned east, and reached the coast road without contact. There they made contact with 12 CAR and 2 CIB, who were through Ortona and moving up the coast road. When they moved north toward trig point 59, however, they were met by machine gun and mortar fire, and encountered numerous mines. The enemy was holding the line of the stream north of the feature, and retained the hill because it was a fine natural defensive position with good observation toward Ortona. He kept his reserves in the northern end of the railway tunnel which ran under the hill. Two tanks lost tracks on mines, and a third bellied on a mine

in the soft ground and had its escape hatch blown in, killing the co-driver. A fourth detonated a mine well in front of our Infantry, and had to be abandoned.

C Sqn and the Royal 22nd moved up, taking over from A Sqn at the ford on the Tollo road. A Sqn moved back to their old positions. RHQ moved to a farmhouse south of the Tollo lateral. The following day, two of the B Sqn tanks around Trig Pt 5 became bogged, making a total of six out of action. C Sqn, at the ford, had one tank damaged by an HE shell.

On 30 Dec, the Royal 22nd sent a coy across the ford, on to the feature between the 2 streams which joined at the ford. As enemy MG and mortar fire prevented the sappers from clearing the ford of mines, C Sqn could not send tanks across with them.

Considerable shelling continued on the last day of the year. At 1400 hrs, a German fighting patrol drive the Carleton and Yorks back from their forward positions facing Trig Pt 5. B Sqn's forward tanks, immobilized by mines and mud, were left alone. About midnight, the tanks were mortared and smoked, and enemy patrols got in behind them, passing within a few feet of them. Everyone stood to for a counter-attack, but none developed.

The new year was ushered in by a blizzard. Cold rain fell, mixed with snow, and slit trenches were filled with an icy mixture of water and mud. At B Echelon, 4 inches of snow fell. At Trig Pt 59, the infantry, though not up to the forward tanks, covered the approaches to them with machine guns. Crews were changed nightly. The remainder of the regiment stayed in the same positions.

The weather improved on 2 Jan. Cpts N. B. Baylay and E. F. Moers, and Lts C. T. Cuthbertson and W. D. Shirriff left to go to England on exchange. Capt D. F. Seabrook and A. C. Morrisson, Lts W. R. R. Newberry, H. Lamb and A. F. Tongs came on exchange from England.

A Sqn was released by 1 C. I. B. and moved up to a harbour near RHQ. B and C Sqns remained in their respective positions, harassed by enemy shelling, but with little else to report. A-1 Echelon near S. Leonardo was dive-bombed by 5 enemy planes at 1330 hrs. No damage was done.

On 3 Jan 44, Trig Pt 5 was taken. Artillery fired an intermittent barrage on the area all day, stopping at intervals and stopped. At 1600 hrs, Infantry went in under the smoke and overran the German positions, taking 20 prisoners. As they were so close to



the target, B Sqn tanks were evacuated during the barrage, but when the infantry moved up, the crews returned, deprived now of the dubious privilege of being the farthest north of any Allied troops in Italy.

On 4 Jan, preparations were made for a move back the following day. The regiment was to take over 14 CAR's rest harbour on the track from S.-Leonardo east to the coast road. A Echelon caught more than its usual nightly shelling, and at 2100 hrs, a shell fired 4 trucks, 2 of petrol, one of ammo and one fitters truck. One of the drivers prevented worse damage by driving the burning ammo truck out of the harbour, getting out just before the shells began to burst.

The move on 5 Jan was postponed, as a heavy rain made it impossible for 14 CAR to get out of the harbour. The four mobile tanks left in B Sqn, however, moved back to the area, crews remaining in the four tanks immobilized at Trig Pt 5. C Sqn moved into the RHQ area. Wet weather continued on 6 Jan, and a corps order forbade all movement of tanks on roads.

The weather improved on 7 Jan, but the move was postponed by a visit of the GOC 1 Cdn Corps, Lt-Gen H. D. G. Crerar. At 1100 hrs, he visited the regiment, and spoke to individual tank crews, congratulating them on their showing in recent operations.

On 8 Jan, the regiment, less 4 B Sqn tanks on Trig Pt 59 moved back to rest and refit. The new harbour was in the 25 pdr gun lines, and the activity of our gunners, coupled with the frequent retaliation of the enemy made it less restful than it might have been. There were some farm houses in the area, but the majority of the regiment slept out of doors. The mud was ankle deep on dry days, and bottomless when it rained.

One B Sqn tank was recovered from Trig Pt 59 on 10 Jan 44, but it proved impossible to work on the others. The area was under direct observation, and after the LAD had a man killed and several narrow escapes, they were ordered to give up the attempt. On 12 Jan, the tanks were sealed up and crews withdrawn.

## VII - WINTER WARFARE

A period of rest and maintenance followed the Ortona battle. During this period, Lt.-Col. Schell and Major R. B. Kerr left the regiment. On 17 Jan., Lt.-Col. R. L. Purves formerly 2 i/c of 12 CAR took over command. On 25 Jan., Major C. M. McLean, formerly A squadron commander in 12 CAR became 2 i/c.

Leaves to the rest centre establish-

ed in S. Vito began. A Echelon had 6 casualties, including one killed on 19 Jan., when shells hit a house they occupied. Shortly after this, the echelon was moved back to B Ech. area. Capt. L. E. Astrop left for RAC tactical course in England, and Capt. W. H. Ellis took over the post of Adjutant. On 24 Jan. 44, 5 officers were attached to 2 C. A. R. (Ld S. H.) to pass on experience gained in the field.

On 22 Jan., recce and advance parties were called to prepare for a move to an area east of Castelfrentano. The Adriatic offensive was bogged in the mud and rain, and had settled itself into a static line. This line started on the Adriatic at Trig Pt. 59, and ran south along the river, following the northerly tributary when it forked. From here, it continued below Tollo to a point just west of Villa Grande. Following various tributaries of the Arielli, which was shared by our troops and the Germans. From Arielli, the positions followed the Orsogna lateral to the cemetery about 3 miles north-east of Orsogna, along the Brecciarola ridge, ran a secondary road from Lanciano to Orsogna. Here, our forward troops held positions within half a mile of Orsogna. Orsogna itself stood boldly out on a rocky spur overlooking the great gulf formed by the headwaters of the Moro. Castelfrentano could be clearly seen across the low ground, as could a substantial stretch of the main road west of that town. Traffic on this winding highway provided a favourite target for German artillery, and the drivers named the stretch "The Mad Mile". Our positions faced the Guardiagrele sector from a number of sharp razor-backed ridges which lay between various tributaries of the Moro, known as "Tank Hill", "Salarolo" and the "Bianco Feature". Thence they ran across a rocky, eroded area to the sheer, snowcovered peaks of the Malellas.

The western sector enjoyed an uneasy sort of peace. The Germans held dominating positions, and reacted quickly with shellfire to any untoward activity, and their patrols were extremely vigorous at times. But no one had any further intention of trying to make a large attack in the area. Small engagements to straighten out a bit of the line, or gain possession of an annoying OP were fought from time to time, but nothing more. As the winter went on, the number of troops holding the front sank to 2 divisions on each side, while the bloody fighting to the southwest, on the other side of the Apennines swallowed the rest. Tanks

could move only on roads, and often not even there. So few tanks were forward, and much time could be spent on training and other activities.

The regiment was not committed when it moved. C sqn. and RHQ arrived on 25 Jan., while A and B stopped off at B Echelon, and came in on 31 Jan. The harbour was on a hill east of Castelfrentano, and, by considerable squeezing, everyone got under cover in farmhouses, barns and a few Nissen huts. A Echelon went into quarters on the southern fringe of Lanciano, while B Echelon remained firmly embedded in the mud.

C Sqn., on 27 Jan., commenced training with the Essex and Ghurkas of 4 Ind. Inf. Div. Training was on co-operation between infantry and tanks in an advance up a road against light opposition. The communication problem came in for considerable attention. The immediate object was to prepare for any possible exploitation of the capture of Orsogna or Guardiagrele by a follow-up to Chieti. On 29 Jan., and on 2 Feb., exercises were held with 1/4 Essex in which co-operation and use of supporting arms was demonstrated. C Sqn. fired live ammunition to demonstrate the effects of the 75mm shell. Experiments were also carried out with the towing of infantry anti-tank guns by Shermans.

On 1 Feb., a troop of C sqn. moved to Salarolo, about 3000 yards east of Guardiagrele to relieve a troop of 12 CAR. This troop returned the next day when 14 CAR took over the positions.

On 3 Feb., Lt.-Col. Purves visited HQ 36 Inf. Bde. at Casoli to examine the possibility of armoured support for an advance on Guardiagrele from the south. The country made the prospects extremely unlikely.

On 6 Feb., 8 Ind. Inf. Bde. (Brig Bovcher) took over from 11 Inf. Bde. The regiment was made responsible for counter-attacks in support.

A/Capt. W. H. Ellis left for Canada on a staff course 11 Feb. 44. A/Capt. D. McNichol was made Adjutant, Lt. J. E. Slinger became I. O.

During February, a program of artillery-tank training was carried on with 111 Army Fd. Regt., RA. FOOs trained in tanks when weather permitted, and tank officers lived for 2 days at a time with 111 Fd. Regt., firing their guns from OPs.

A relief in the Castelfrentano sector brought 2 Indep. Para. Bde. into the line, on 16 Feb., and the regiment tied in with them for counter-attacks. Six days training was carried out with 53

Fd. Regt., RA.

Production of a play on tank-infantry co-operation began on 18 Feb. 44. The play was for a 13 Corps discussion group at Lanciano. The cast included Lt.-Col. Purves, Lt.-Col. Whitty, 5 RWK, and Major D. H. McIndoe.

On 19 Feb., 13 Corps requested 50 ORs and 3 Officers proficient in skiing from 1 Cdn. Armd. Bde. The regiment produced 5 officers and 63 ORs and took on the whole responsibility. By 1415 hours, the party was on its way to 13 Corps Transit Camp at Atesa to receive equipment and orders. Capt. A. C. Morrisson was in command, Capt. D. McNichol was 2 i/c, Capt. W. G. Hamm, and Lts. C. B. D. Jamieson and N. G. Guthrie were section leaders. RSM Prevost of 12 CAR was the only member from outside the regiment. Ski equipment including boots, skis, poles, parkas, ski pants, gloves, etc., were issued at Atesa, and orders were received to proceed next morning to Tornarecchio, southwest of Atesa, which was road-head for skiing supplies to detachments of 56 Recce Regt., snowed in at Montazzoli and Colle Dimezzo.

On 20 Feb., the ski party delivered supplies to Montazzoli and Colle Dimezzo. The road to these two towns was opened by bull-dozers the same day. On 22 Feb., the party moved to HQ 51 Recce Regt. at Castiglione Messer Marino, and in the morning of 23 Feb., ski detachments started off hauling sledges to Pescopennataro with supplies for 12 Podolian Lancers of the Polish Carpathian Div., who were relieving 56 Recce at Pescopennataro. Though a mountain blizzard blew up, the supplies were delivered. The party billeted at Agnone on 24 Feb. On 25 Feb., they returned to Atesa and turned in equipment, and on 26 Feb., returned to the regiment.

On 22 Feb., Brig. R. A. Wyman made a farewell visit to the regiment before returning to the U. K. Capt. Illingworth of 655 A. O. P. Sqn. had dinner at RHQ and discussed AOP-tank co-operation.

On 23 Feb., Major Gen. Richardson of the War Office and Brig. Ivor Moore, BAFV, 8 Army visited the regiment. Brig. Tetley of 25 Armd. Bde. visited the regiment 24 Feb. On the same day Major L. A. Gerry arrived and took over C Sqn. from Major H. A. Smith, MC, who was returning with Brig. Wyman to the U. K.

On 25 and 26 Feb., Corps discussion on tank-Inf. co-op was held. On the latter date, the play "Tanks a Million" was given in Lanciano Opera House.

On 27 Feb., Brig R. A. Wyman held a farewell at home at A Mess 1 C. A. B., at which the new Bde. Comd., Brig W. C. Murphy, formerly of 5 Cdn. Armd. Div., was introduced. At 1830 hours a tank-AOP-Arty discussion was held at RHQ Mess attended by 2 officers from 655 AOP Sqn., 1 officer from 111 Fd. Regt., RA, and all Sqn. comds. Major D. H. McIndoe and Lt. S. Jourard left for RHQ 5 Para. Bn. to recce tracks from Casoli to Guardiagrele. They spent 2 days in this area, going on night patrols, and investigating forward areas by daylight. Their researches showed that the area was definitely not tankable.

On 28 Feb., the C. O. attended a tank and mortar fire demonstration at S. Vito. Col. Gordon Hall, Main 8 Army AFV Technical, visited RHQ at 1300 hours. The C. O. made a flight in an AOP to look over routes to Guardiagrele.

On 29 Feb., Majors D. H. Hunter and L. A. Gerry and Capt. A. C. Morrisson attended a battlefield tour in the Mozzagrognia area sponsored by 17 Ind. Inf. Bde. The C. O. attended the Brigadier's conference at Main HQ, 1 CAB.

On 1 Mar., Lt. W. G. Harrod went to 1 CAB for a tour of duty as a liaison officer. The Bde. Comd. visited the regiment to inspect vehicles. The C. O. met Brig. Boucher, 17 Ind. Inf. Bde., to discuss training.

On 2 Mar., a 25-pr with crew from 111 Fd. Regt. arrived to tour the sqns. A mine school with RE instructors was started in B Ech by Capt. W. V. Hill to train recce troop and tank crews in mine lifting. The C. O. and I. O. visited 1/5 RGR at Colli to discuss training. Major L. A. Gerry liaised with 1 A & SH reference counter-attack role. Major H. F. F. Millen visited 2 C. I. B. reference training.

On 3 Mar., training with 66 Med. Regt. RA commenced. Officers were exchanged between the 2 regiments. The C. O. and I. O. visited 17 Ind. Inf. Bde. to discuss training and operations.

On 5 Mar., another discussion was held with officers of 111 Fd. and 655 AOP sqn concerning experiments recently carried out on marking of tanks for recognition from air. It was agreed that large yellow-painted letters on the back deck were suitable.

On 6 Mar., the C. O. went Bde. to receive orders for the regiment's role in a regrouping. 5 Cdn. Armd. Div. and 2 Indep. Para. Bde. were leaving the Adriatic sector, and V Corps coming directly under command AFHQ. 11th CAR came under command 1 Cdn. Inf. Div. 10 Mar. 44 in the Ortona sector.

On 7 Mar., the C. O. travelled by plane for leave in Cairo and Major C. M. McLean took over temporary command. Recces for relief of 2 CAR on 12 Mar. were carried out. On this and the following day, A Sqn. carried out TEWTS and discussions with 2 C. I. B.

The next few days were spent in recces and in preparing for the move to the Ortona sector. It was necessary to pull many of the tanks out of their harbour areas with recovery tanks.

On 12 Mar., the regiment moved. RHQ set up at 338134 north of S. Leonardo on the coast road. A Sqn came u/c 3 C. I. B. in the Berardi area, B sqn came u/c 11 C.I.B. near Villa Caldari, and C Sqn command 1 C.I.B. in the coastal sector north of Ortona. A Ech moved from Lanciano to S. Apollinare. B Ech moved to an area just south of S. Vito, their first move since the Moro crossing in December.

There was considerable shelling in the area. RHQ was shelled in the afternoon of 13 Mar, but there were many duds. A Sqn was shelled the same day and their house hit. One man was wounded.

On 14 Mar, A Sqn was shelled again and suffered another casualty. The Bde Comd inspected the new positions. C Sqn moved back to a gully on the north edge of Ortona.

On 15 Mar, the accurate enemy shelling of A Sqn's house forced them to move to dugouts. On this date 2 C.I.B. relieved 11 C.I.B.

On 17 Mar, another regrouping was ordered. In order to create a Corps Reserve, RHQ and A Sqn were to move to Villa Roatti, just across the Moro due west of S. Apollinare. B and C Sqn's continued in support of 1 Cdn Div. The move was made at 1000 hrs 18 Mar, and everyone was settled in at 1230. C Sqn, less 2 tps, took over A Sqn commitments in support of 2 C.I.B. 2 tps C Sqn u/c Capt A. T. McNabb remained on the coastal sector in support of 1 C.I.B.

During this period, a considerable indirect fire program was carried out, particularly by C sqn, and many useful lessons were learned. Tanks were surveyed in and were fired from both surveyed and unsurveyed positions.

On 21 Mar 44, Major McLaren, 2 i/c 40 RTR of 23 Armd Bde arrived at RHQ to coordinate the relief of 11 CAR by 40 RTR. No information was yet available about future plans after the relief.

On 25 Mar, at an O Gp at 1 CAB, details of the move were laid on. On relief by 23 Armd Bde, 1 CAB was moving to the area of Venafro to join 3 Army. Tanks were to move by rail,



wheels by road, staging at Termoli.

On 27 Mar, C Sqn RTR relieved C Sqn 11 CAR, and the latter moved to a staging area north of S. Vito Marina to await train. Advance parties u/c Maj J. T. F. Orr left for Venafrò area.

On 28 Mar, RHQ and B Sqn were relieved and command passed to 40 RTR. On 29 Mar, A Sqn was relieved, and the regiment was complete in the staging area. Maj. McLean held an O Gp with sqn 2 i/cs to plan the wheeled move.

On 30 Mar, C Sqn entrained at S. Vito Marina. Other squadrons entrained the 3 following days.

On 31 Mar, the wheeled convoy left B Ech area 0640 hrs, proceeding to staging area at Termoli, where it arrived at 1305 hrs.

On 1 Apr, convoy left Termoli at 0730 hrs and proceeded via Larino, Campobasso and Isernia to a harbour near Piedimonte d' Alife. The tanks, which detrained at Caserta, also harboured in this area. On 5 Apr, the regiment moved to its permanent area, the river flats by the Volturno area 1008, where a regular tented camp was set up. In this area training and liason with 4 Br Inf Div and 8 Ind Inf Div were to be carried on. As this training led up to the Gari crossing, it will be described in the next chapter.

### VIII "THE GARI SHOW"

Although the weather conditions in Italy had not changed perhaps since Hanibals' time, modern warfare did not allow the luxury of retiring to winter quarters, and so the relentless battle moved on.

While the Canadians of 8 Army were throwing the enemy out of Ortona, the American and French troops of 5 Army in the central sector continued their slow but exhausting task of clearing one mountain strongpoint after another. On 5 Jan, the Americans, in conjunction with the British on their left flank, launched an attack on a front of some 10 miles. San Vittore was captured after two days of bitter street fighting. The Germans, naturally sensitive about this threat to their Cassino defences, reacted vigorously. On 13 Jan. The Americans took Cervaro, disposing their forward troops less than 3 miles from Cassino. On the following day the French occupied Aquafondata after an advance of 4 miles all along the line. With the capture of the last important mountain feature blocking the way to Cassino, the Americans advanced into the lower ground beyond to encounter a further obstacle in the Rapido river.

British troops launched an attack

across the river Garigliano, on the night of 17/18 Jan, to capture Minturno. Heavy bombing of communications was carried on north and south of Rome to prevent any large scale movement of enemy to the Anzio area, where British and American forces landed in the early morning of 22 Jan. The Anzio-Nettuno bridgehead, in spite of its initial surprise and success, was indeed ill-fated.

The French and Americans engaged in the bitterest fighting, the former for the possession of the heights north of Cassino and the latter in an attempt to force the crossing of the river Rapido. The Americans who, by the 22 Jan, had established two small bridgeheads across the Rapido north and south of S. Angelo, suffered considerable casualties and were forced to withdraw. By 3 Feb it appeared that Cassino was substantially outflanked from the north. An American Inf Regiment, in the Northern outskirts of the town, was fighting house to house. Despite the increasing efforts of our forces, the situation remained substantially unchanged.

The strategic airforce attacked the monastery at Monte Cassino on 15 Feb. The inhabitants thereof were warned that the high command was compelled to adopt this course in view of the Germans' use of the place as a military strong point. The monastery founded by St. Benedict in 529, from the site of a temple of Apollo, was the cradle of the Benedict order. At the suppression of the monasteries in Italy in 1866, Monte Cassino was declared a National monument and became an Educational establishment with about 40 monks and 200 pupils.

The wiles of the enemy were not all our forces had to contend with. The vagaries of nature presented, from time to time, an equally difficult and equally unwelcome challenge. The Rapido overflowed its banks North of Cassino; the lowland was flooded and the Liri Valley was a sea of mud.

On the heels of the heaviest air effort in the campaign to date, when 2000 tons of bombs screamed on Cassino, the New Zealand corps went in to attack. The railway station was captured and the town was almost cleared. Some Indian troops did manage to get within 200—300 yds of the monastery but were forced to withdraw on the night of 24/25 March. Enemy strongpoints in houses and other fortified points defied capture. The position remained with slight change; — so it was at Cassino, the heart of the Gustav line.



Success in battle can be assured by adequate training and preparation. At this point it had become a well recognized fact that a combined Infantry-Tank operation required the utmost practise. To this end the regiment went full out to ensure that every tank man understood every aspect of Infantry tactics, and as well, to see to it that the Infantry understood thoroughly how the tanks operated.

Thus with a perfect degree of mutual understanding as the goal, the Regiment, on the 8 April 1944, commenced liaison with 4 Br. Inf. Div.

The Unit was encamped on the West bank of the Voltorno river less than a mile from the smelly town Presenzano. The river was fordable. Running back from the East bank was a good Infantry-tank area.

Some conception of the enthusiasm and thoroughness of the training can be had from the following account of a mock battle fought on the 11 April 1944.

At 1600 hrs 9 Apr the C.O. with Lt/Col. Platt, C.O. of 2 Somerset Light Infantry, went to a convenient O.P. to recon the ground and make their plan for the attack. They decided that two companies of Infantry, each supported by a squadron of tanks, were required to do the job. At 0800 hrs 10 April "A" and "B" companies of 2 Som. L.I. assembled in the regimental area with "A" and "B" squadrons. Lt.-Col. R. L. Purves gave an introductory lecture on the tank. This completed, the Infantry, except officers, assembled in the tank park, where they were given detailed instructions on the tanks by the tank crews. At the same time the C.O. conducted a discussion among all the officers on all points pertinent to Infantry-Tank operations. At 1100 hrs the C.O. of 2 Som. L.I. held orders group for his company commanders on the ground. This was attended by squadron commanders. The respective company and squadron commanders then tied in their plans, and at 1400 hrs held order groups on the ground for platoon on troop commanders. These in turn carried out their reces and tied in their plans.

On 11 Apr at 0400 hrs "A" and "B" companies of 2 Som. L.I. married up with "A" and "B" squadrons in the assembly area. By 0600 hrs they had arrived at the D.P. where the infantry debussed and moved, independently by platoons, on the pre-arranged troop in the F.U.P. At first light the Infantry moved forward across the start line and the attack was underway.

For three hours the peaceful Voltorno countryside acquired all the

grim semblance of a battlefield; the rumble of tanks; the spitting of machine guns; the crack of rifles; all to the steady beat of the tank guns as they poured smoke onto an exposed right flank. A discussion of all phases of the attack ensued.

It should be remembered that an Infantry Tank battle includes many other supporting arms such as mortars, field and medium artillery. Co-ordination of all arms is absolutely essential.

On the 24 April Brig. Boucher, Cmdr of 17 Ind. Inf. Bde., 8 Ind. Div., tied in arrangements for training with the unit. With the exception that each squadron was allocated to an Infantry Bn., the training took the same form as that carried out with units from 4 Br. Div.

The enthusiasm of the Indian troops, who were immensely impressed by the versatility and co-operation of the tank lads, was reflected throughout camp. That thrilling spirit of anticipation was in the air. Great days were approaching.

A pile of rubble, the continental hotel, had been the Hotel Exelsior, the best hotel in town. The hotel Des Roses was a private house belonging to a rich lawyer, converted into flats two years before the war. The Barons' palace was an old monastery, long since fallen into decay. The combined school and town hall had been converted into a hospital by the Germans. The crypt belonged to the Carmelite church, which was the religious centre of the town. There was nothing south of route six to differentiate the New Quarter from anything else in that Hell of deathly smell and dust. To sum up the situation at Cassino; — the enemy seemed reconciled to our possession of the larger portion of the town but was indeed sensitive about the station and the castle, both of which provided possible jumping off places for a renewal of our offensive. In the town itself, he was in rather a more uncomfortable position than ourselves, inspite of his possession of the high ground behind and the fortress monastery on it. His line of communication was exposed from the flank, and in the northern end of the town he was surrounded on all but one side.

Two troops from "A" sqn, one from "B" and one from "C" sqn, their packs loaded with rations, faces blackened, crept stealthily across the Rapido Bridge, on the light of a full-moon on the 30 April, to relieve a squadron of the Three Rivers Regiment and man the tanks that dare not move. There was a terrifying silence, relieved only by an occasional burst of machine gun

fire and the swish of 25 pounder smoke shells passing overhead, as the lads walked that long mile into the town. For 3 days the men sat in their tanks at such close quarters with the Germans that to change the position of a periscope was to call down a merciless barrage of enemy fire. It was a much lighter step that took them back from that mess of unburied dead, on relief by New Zealanders.

On 8 May, "B" squadron and 1/12 Frontier Force Regiment wound up their training with a battalion run. And so ended a period of the most intensive and constructive training ever undertaken by the 8 Army units. A period where Indians, Canadians, New Zealanders, English and Polish were moulded into a mighty fighting machine. It was not a period of drudgery — far from it — it was spattered with unforgettable incidents. There was that morning before light when Gen. Leese, the commander of the Eight Army, was crossing by a foot bridge to watch the unit in its manoeuvres. A sentry challenged the intruder and upon hearing the reply: "I am the Army Commander," said — "Come off that stuff, I am getting tired". Lt.-Gen. Sir Oliver Leese made two informal visits to the unit during that period. Other visitors included Lt.-Gen. Burnes, commander of 1 Cdn Corps and Maj.-Gen. Russel, commander of 8 Ind. Div.

On the same day that the intensive training ended, the C.O. attended an orders group at H.Q. 17 Ind. Bde. On the 9 May he attended a final orders group at H.Q. 1 C.A.B., and at 1400 hrs on the following day, held his regimental group. By 0300 hrs on the 11 May, the Regiment had moved from its Volturno harbour to an assembly area just behind Mount Trocchio, three miles south-east of Cassino.

At 2300 hrs on that same memorable day the whole Liri Valley lurched with the thunder from the hundreds of guns, so well concealed that the enemy was taken by complete surprise. The sky was ablaze; — this was our signal that 5 and 8 Armies had renewed the offensive against the Gustav line. That long period of preparation, training and regrouping had all been designed toward this day, when our attack on those German defensive positions could be opened.

The mighty fortress monastery hill, towering above Cassino, backed by Mount Cairo, dominated the entrance to the Liri Valley. The Rapido River, running from the impregnable mountains through the South Western outskirts of Cassino to form the Gari,

was the entrance. Eight miles South of Cassino the Gari has junction with the Liri, flowing in from the West, to form the Garigliano, which winds Southward to the Gulf of Gaeta. The Liri Valley then, runs N.W. from the Gari River, bounded on the left side by the Liri itself and the mountains to the South, and on the right by Route 6 and the Appenines. For miles south of Cassino, on the road to S. Giorgio, was the little town of S. Angelo. From S. Angelo to Pignataro, four miles West, and North to the Rio Piopetto, and South to the Liri, the country was rolling and well fringed with copses. West of Pignataro were open fields and scattered trees and small copses. North of the Rio Piopetto to highway 6, the country was flat and cultivated, dotted with scattered clumps. In the South, the rolling country dropped into flat, open fields, which extended to the bank of the Liri.

It was the responsibility of 17 Ind. Bde, supported by the 11 CAR, to seize and hold a bridgehead across the Gari at S. Angelo, with a view to a further advance. The immediate right and left flanks were the responsibility of 4 Br. Div and 19 Ind. Bde respectively.

The initial task allotment placed C and B Squadrons in support of Royal Fusiliers, on the right of the town, and 1/12 Frontier Force Regiment, on the left, to seize the bridgehead, then to push out to secure it. "A" sqn was to cover the right flank of the brigade then to establish contact with 1/5 Royal Gurkha Rifles, in the centre and assist them in any role required.

Since the Gari could not be forded, the tanks were to cross by two Bailey Bridges, which were to be constructed by first light on 12 May. By 0800 hrs the bridge, one mile South of S. Angelo, was completed, but the heavy opposition at S. Angelo prevented any work at all on the bridge site there. "B" sqn was clear of Oxford, the bridge a mile south, by 0850 hrs and was very busy engaging the enemy, well dug in along the ridge running along the road, south of S. Angelo. Between the road and the river bank was a low, level, water-logged strip, which gave rise to very awkward circumstances. Before "B" sqn reached the road over half the tanks were bogged.

North of S. Angelo, the 1 Royal Fusiliers were having an extremely difficult time. Enemy fire was so intense that the entire battalion was pinned down along the rivers edge. The 1/5 RGR had crossed the river into S. Angelo and were hard pressed. Lt.-Col. Purves directed "C" sqn to cross the river immediately, then to swing north

along the lateral road to S. Angelo, assist the 1/5 RGR to gain control in the town, thence work North to relieve the 1 RF. "C" squadron encountered the same situation of bogged tanks as "B" sqn. At 1200 hrs, between the two squadrons, there were sixteen tanks in the mud. In spite of the continuous harassing enemy fire, the crews of the immobile tanks set about to adjust the situation, Capt. Patton and his recovery section from 59 LAD rolled up their sleeves and went to their assistance. At 1400 hrs, with "B" sqn still pouring fire into targets in front of the FFR, and with a troop from "C" sqn, on the lateral, headed for S. Angelo, and with some of the bogged tanks recovering, the situation seemed to be improving. A few hundred yards short of S. Angelo, a very important culvert was blown. This left the tanks to seek a way round. The frantic efforts of both squadrons to find this way resulted, always, in the bogging of another tank. The promised bridge for the gap did not materialize. "B" sqn did manage to get tanks into the South Western fringe of the town, but no matter how they tried, could not get into the town proper, or get assistance to 1/5 RGR. They did, however, in conjunction with the F.F.R. clear the entire area of their first objective, immediately South and South-West. "C" sqn, while waiting for the bridge formed a defensive position to cover B sqn and the FFR, and to protect any crews debogging tanks. A snipers bullet killed Lt. C. S. Dickson of C sqn as he pressed his relentless efforts to find a way into S. Angelo.

That night, while our forces clung desperately to their few hundred yds of the West Bank, in the face of fierce resistance, a new plan for clearing S. Angelo was made. This plan called for the evacuation of the town by 1/5 RGR so that a real artillery barrage could be brought to bear. Five of the unit's tanks were bogged so close to the town that the crews were forced to leave.

The morning of 13 May was spent in recovering tanks, reorganizing for the new attack and shooting up any target that presented itself. At 1200 hrs two troops from "B" squadron were detailed to make another attempt to get into the town. One tank made an unsuccessful effort to hurdle the gap. Another troop swung well to the right, picking its ground; and one tank, commanded by Cpl. L. Toye, got through. Cpl. Toye linked up with the 1/5 RGR and before very long the town was well on the way to being cleared. An enemy tank, well protected in the rubble of a basement, was soon knocked out. Cpl Toye's tank was soon joined

by another from "B" squadron. By 1800 hrs the scissors bridge, ordered early in the day, was being directed into position. Soon afterwards "C" sqn passed through the town, now reported clear by Cpl. Toye, and joined the R. F. Before dark the situation was so completely restored, that "C" sqn had carried the infantry forward to its second objective, the high ground through Colle Romano. "B" sqn, now in support of 1/5 RGR was firmly established in S. Angelo and before long had forward elements in Colle Vitiglio, a thousand yards to the West. At the same time an emergency force from RHQ was supporting the FFR on to their second objective. By the end of the day all recoverable tanks but four were back in action.

From North to South along the whole Gustav Line the offensive fared as follows: N.W. of Cassino the allies made some initial small advances, but in the face of the most stubborn enemy resistance and counter attacks. The latter proved too much and by the evening of 13 May our forces were back to their start line again, having suffered fairly heavy casualties. The town of Cassino itself produced no reaction whatever. In our immediate sector a bridgehead of about 4 miles was gained and successfully extended. By the evening of 13 May the better part of two Divisions and a number of tanks were across, and mopping up was in process. The town of S. Angelo was captured after fierce enemy resistance had been overcome. On the right flank of 5 Army Sector, French troops progressed favourably and by the end of 13 May were within two and a half miles of S. Ambrogio.

It was clear that the Germans intended to fight it out where they stood. Gen. Alexander stated that although first accounts were favourable no spectacular results could be looked for in this most sticky battle.

On the morning of 14 May, "C" Sqn, with the R. F. having cleared many anti-tank guns from the hedge-rows, were firm on their objectives. The enemy unleashed a strong counter attack on the "B" sqn sector. The artillery fire, called down to break the attack, fell short onto our forward positions. The infantry were compelled to withdraw, but Lt. R. Mulcaster, with the forward tanks, held fast, corrected the artillery onto the enemy, and saved a very dangerous situation. By now the position was reconsolidated. The tanks and Infantry overran no less than 8 anti-tank guns, knocked out one Mk IV and one S.P. gun in restoring the situation.

The following morning "A" sqn passed through "B" sqn and in conjunction with the FFR forged ahead, knocking out 4 anti-tank guns, and silencing one S. P. gun, to consolidate on the high ground overlooking the Pignataro-Cassino road.

An excellent job done, the regiment on the 16 May was ordered to retire to a rest area near S. Vittore, a town 8 miles S. E. of Cassino.

## IX. "THE HITLER LINE"

The chilly fog penetrated a crowded back room in a farm house on the edge of Aquino airport, where at 0400 hrs, 1 May Lt.- Col. Purves issued orders his squadron commanders as they huddled a candle in a desperate effort to read their maps. It was cold — no one had slept —.

The offensive, to date, had fared better than had dared hope. Our bridgehead at S. Angelo was steadily extended and built up. By the 16 May, the whole line of the Cassino — S.-Giorgio rd had been crossed. On 17 May, two formations, South of Cassino, turned N.W. to cut route 6, and on the following day one of the Polish divisions had captured the long coveted Monastery Hill. This, in combination with advances further South, meant that the Gustav line was completely overrun, and the advance continued to the Hitler line. Under the impetus of the F.E.C. attack to the south of the Liri the Germans became disorganized and began to retreat. The French took full advantage and moved forward steadily to capture Esperia by 17 May. Further South, the redoubtable Goums had been unleashed and were campaigning in the mountains between Spigno and Esperia.

With the fall of Cassino, on the 18 May, the Germans, using Piedmonte as a pivot, were swinging their defences to the Hitler Line. The Hitler Line, commencing in the mountains to the South, utilized every available natural obstacle to Ponteconno, from where it followed the line of the Forme D'Aquino to Aquino, thence North, to follow along the foot of the hills and break into a broad arc to cover the approaches to Piedmonte and thereby prevent any outflanking movement from the Liri Valley up the wide re-entrant commanded by the village. From here, the line struck North to incorporate Mount Cairo and Terelle. Although a very formidable defence, it lacked depth.

The most dangerous weapon in the defence was the Pill Box; a Panther turret, with a high velocity 75 mm gun, mounted on a reinforced concrete emplacement. There were sufficient of

these to cover every inch of the entire sector, which was open only to frontal assault.

The regiment had been warned, on the 18 May, to be prepared to move up in support of 78 Br. Div in a counter attack role. The squadrons had only just moved into position when the order came to move at once to a lying up area immediately South of Aquino Airport. Aquino had been reported clear.

By 0200 hrs 1 May, after a hazardous march in the pitch black night, the regiment arrived at the Airport. The C.O. reported to the command post of the 5 Buffs, where the acting C.O. of 26 Armd Bde was holding forth with his plan for the breakthrough.

In essence this plan provided for 26 Armd Bde to breakthrough Aquino and exploit with an armoured sweep. In the event that exploitation was not too successful, 11 CAR was to support 36 Br Bde in securing the bridgehead. The two phases of the attack were to be coincident, that all might take advantage of the barrage. One stipulation, however, was that the tanks of 26 Armd Bde must pass through first.

Thus it was that at 0400 hrs, Major D. H. McIndoe was ordered to tie "B" squadron in with the 5 Buffs and support them directly into Aquino. Major H. F. Millen was to move "A" squadron to the North end of the Airport and cover the entire right flank. "C" sqn was to remain in reserve with 6 Royal West Kent Regt. The left flank was to be taken care of by 8 A and S.H.

The heavy mist still hung like a blanket over the valley at 0500 hrs as the tanks moved out. The barrage came down and the attack was on. The axis of advance was West along the Airport road into Aquino. On the left of the road was one coy of 5 Buffs supported by a troop from "B" sqn, commanded by Lt. K. D. McCord, and on the right was another coy supported by a troop. "A" sqn moved to the North end of the airport. The heavy fog continued to restrict visibility so that the initial advance was delayed for some time. At 0700 hrs the advance had not reached the cemetery, midway between the airport and the town, on the right of the road. The cemetery, in fact, turned out to be a very difficult spot, defended by the enemy to the last man. There was some cover on the left of the road, in the form of Vineyards, extending to within 1000 yds of the town.

At 0745 hours a B sqn tank was knocked out, attempting to winkle the enemy out of the cemetery. To neutralize this strong point, Major Millen decided to send a troop of A sqn north



to cross the railroad onto route 6, with a view to entering the town from that direction, thereby cutting off any German outposts. Meanwhile the troop commanded by Lt. K. D. McCord, having advanced beyond the cover, came under fire from an anti-tank gun on the left. As they silenced this gun, a well camouflaged pill box opened up from the right. By now the tanks were some 300 yards short of the town, and a mere stones throw from the gun. Although each tank was hit at least twice, the crews remained at their posts returning fire until the flames threatened to singe their bodies. In spite of this, and the fact that these men evacuated in that treeless spot, under the very nose of the enemy, all save one man got back safely.

The fog had faded. The smoke supply was running low. The screen, on the hills to the north to protect the right flank, thinned. Our entire force came under direct, observed fire from the high ground. A sqn edged north and C sqn went out to cover A and the right flank. The infantry were still pinned at the cemetery. A direct hit on a carrier had killed their C. O. and entire signals section. Communication with the infantry was completely lost, leaving the tanks in the extremely awkward situation of not knowing where they could fire. Two more B sqn tanks were knocked out at 0930. Capt. J. I. Nichol commanding the two forward troops was wounded. A sqns attempts to cross the railroad were frustrated time and again. Their commander, Major H. F. Millen, was seriously wounded. Capt. Hawkins took over command, and through his untiring efforts, the right flank was kept covered and many an enemy gun laid low. The enemy shelling continued in terrific intensity. Lt. J. Symons was severely burned, when his tank burst into flames. Lt. J. Cameron of C sqn manoeuvred his troop in rear of A sqn. While trying desperately to cross the railway tracks he was knocked out by an anti-tank gun firing from the rear. Communications were never re-established with the infantry. They too were in a hopeless position. It was impossible to move.

26 Armd Bde's attack failed even to get under way. The 11 CAR was ordered to hold its ground. This it did and bravely too, subjected to brutal fire from three sides all day long. Scarcely a tank escaped a direct hit from shell or mortar or anti-tank gun. Twelve tanks were knocked out completely. When, after dusk on that day, the regiment was ordered to withdraw

to a harbour immediately south of the Forme D'Aquino, including one enemy tank, one S. P. gun and a good number of anti-tank guns.

The excellent work done by 392 Bty of 98 Field Regt. R. A. (S. P.) had not been given due mention in this account. cooperated with and supported the unit. The reason is simply that the Bty had for so long, that it had become part of it. It must be appreciated, therefore, that whenever the unit is mentioned, in action or out, through hell and glory, 392 Bty is included. As in every other action from Ortona, on 392 Bty who toiled from dawn till dark that memorable day of Aquino, it was to smoke that right flank, or when the smoke ran thin, shelled and shelled to keep the enemy from loosing a slaughter on our lads.

Fortunes of the Italian campaign continued to prosper and at that time the enemy was faced with the most unpleasant situation he had experienced since Cap. Bon, a little over a year previously. The resistance at the Hitler line was such that only a well organized attack could pay. General Alexander decided that a joint attack should go in on 23 May; one to crack the Hitler line, and one to break out of the Anzio beachhead and cut the main lines of communication between Rome and the enemy facing our troops in the Liri Valley.

This time the regiment was to support 38 Br. Bde (The Irish Bde) of 78 Br. Div., in the follow up role. Sqn commanders immediately set about liaising with battalions; A sqn with 6 Inniskills, B sqn with 2 London Irish Rifles, C sqn with Royal Irish Fusiliers.

78 Div., after breaking through Aquino with 11 Brigade and 14 CAR was to pursue the enemy along route 6. Eighth Ind. Div was to seize Castrocielo and Roccasecca, two towns on the high ground overlooking Aquino. At the same time 1 Cdn Corps, on the left was to smash through the Hitler Line at Pontecorvo, some 3 miles south of Aquino.

The initial plan, whereby 11 Bde supported by 14 CAR would take Aquino by frontal assault, was modified when the 14 CAR had 4 tanks brewed up in a diversional attack on the 24 May.

56 Recce Regt., supported by A sqn 11 CAR, was ordered to cross the Forme D'Aquino in the Cdn sector, then swing north to Castrocielo, meanwhile the remainder of the regiment was to lie up in the Cdn sector, prepared to push forward with 38 Bde to the Melfa river line, 5 miles N. W.

By 0710 the 25 May, Aquino had fallen. A sqn, commanded by Capt. E. K. Kennedy, with 56 Recce regt., moved through Aquino to route 6 and on to Castrocielo. They skirted the town, capturing two abandoned enemy tanks and went on to shoot up Roccasecca. The remainder of the regiment moved forward independently in an armoured sweep, immediately south of route 6, to the Melfa, where they were ordered to await the arrival of 38 Br. Bde.

By 24 May, the Cdn Corps had broken the Hitler Line. Further south, the French had attacked at the same time and were approaching S. Giovanni. On the coastal flank the Americans had thrust up towards Priverno, and fought through the difficult mountainous country to reach Terracina.

The Hitler Line had been completely overrun by 25 May. The offensive to break out of the Anzio Bridgehead opened at 0600 hrs 23 May. Separate columns thrust toward the Applan way, and on 25 May Cisterna was in our hands.

The enemy, faced with the uncomfortable situation of being forced to rely on the Sora-Alatri roads for the extrication of his forces from the main front, was compelled to fight desperately in the sector of Arce to north of Castro Di Volsci, that he might impede our advance as long as possible, thereby protecting Frosinone, gateway of the northern road exits.

On May 26, 38 Brigade moved forward to join the regiment on the Melfa. Brig. Scott and Lt.-Col. Purves immediately tied in their plans to rush forward and establish a bridgehead across the Liri River, just north of Ceprano, to thus outflank Arce.

27 May found "C" sqn underway with R.I.F. They crossed the Melfa along Route 6 to Coldragone, whence they moved South to skirt Mt. Grande and Mt. Piccolo, two enemy strong points commanding Arce. Since no recce element was available it fell to Lt. J. E. Davis to find a route across the densely wooded, rolling countryside to Ceprano. This he did with remarkable success, in spite of the almost insurmountable obstacles. "B" squadron followed closely with 2 L.I.R., then RHQ with 38 Bde tac, and "A" sqn with 6 Innisks. "C" sqn and R.I.F. consolidated that night on the high ground overlooking the lateral from Arce to Ceprano. The following morning, they pushed on to cross the Liri at Ceprano, and headed North 1000 yds to hold the bridgehead. This remarkable action not only established the bridgehead but opened up a much needed supply route for the

Division.

The 3 Hussars from 9 Br. Armd Bde relieved the Regiment, and by 30 May, it had concentrated a few miles S.E. of the Melfa crossing.

#### X. "LAKE TRASIMENO"

On 4 June, Allied troops entered Rome and in very short time had progressed forty miles N.W. The previous week had seen the steady advance up the Sacco Valley and Route 6, and the exploitation of the breakout from the Anzio bridgehead. In the Adriatic sector, as a result of allied successes to the South, the enemy had withdrawn. On 8 June Pescara and Chieti were captured. The Eighth Army continued to make steady progress to Avezzano. The week ending 21 June saw the enemy still withdrawing on the Adriatic. Teramo was entered on 16 June. The main event on 8th Army front was the breaking through of enemy delaying positions on the way North to Perugia and Lake Trasimeno. Latest reports showed we controlled the road Terni-Spoleto-Foligno, and were within 5 miles of Perugia. On the right of 5th Army, two French Divisions, which had been advancing up both shores of Lake Bolsena, also came up against the delaying position as they approached the lateral road from Orvieto to the coast.

From the end of May till 11 June, the 11 CAR had busied itself, getting things ship-shape once again. A regimental memorial service was held on 5 June. On the hot dusty afternoon of 11 June, the Regiment received orders placing it u/c 4 Br. Inf. Div. and by 13 June it had arrived complete in an area North of Rome, where it joined 28 Bde of 4 Br. Div. Three days later it rolled again, North of Viterbo, and on the next day was ordered to move u/c 78 Br. Div. Thus at 0400 hrs 1 June, in the pouring rain, the unit was again on the road to join 38 Bde.

On 20 June squadrons were back with their respective Irish battalions, and Brig. Scott with Lt.-Col. Purves was tying in another plan. This time it was the Trasimeno Line. The enemy's position, running from the S.W. corner of Lake Trasimeno, West to Route 71 at Pucciarelli, thence South to Sanfaticchio, was very strong indeed. According to captured documents it was to be held at all costs, that the enemy might make an orderly withdrawal to the Gothic Line North of Florence.

The intension of 38 Brigade was to pass through 11 Brigade and drive the enemy from his position in Castiglione Del-Lago, a town on the West coast of the lake; B Squadron in support of 2

London Irish to advance and take the town of Sanfaticchio; A Squadron in support of 6 Inniskillings to advance on axis of route 71 to Castiglione Del-Lago.

On the fair cool morning of 21st June, at 0400 hrs, the tanks moved off, and at 1917 hrs B Squadron was established on the west side of Sanfaticchio. The infantry mopped up the town as the tanks coralled the many prisoners. By 1130 hrs the town was cleared, and the advance continued North-West. Enemy resistance increased, Mortar and shell fire crumped and whistled everywhere. Lt. Hopkins and Cpl. Toye had their tanks knocked out by an Anti-Tank Gun, later silenced, when Lt. Hopkins directed artillery fire onto it. In a short time B Squadron reported only tanks operational. A Squadron, with 6 Innisks, was moving up on the right of Route 71 and by 1030 reached Carraia, midway between route 71 and the lake. An anti-tank gun 1500 yds to the North-West was destroyed by 392 Bty.

The advance continued toward Pucciarelli, with B Squadron closing in from the left and A Squadron from the right. An A Squadron tank was knocked out just before reaching the town, where Lt. J. A. MacIver seized the initiative to clear on through. He consolidated along a line from the cemetery, North-East to Pucciarelli, across the railway toward the lake shore. On 22 June the London Irish was heavily counter attacked; the attack was beaten off with severe loss to the enemy.

At 0530 on 24 June, C Squadron, with the Royal Irish Fuseliers, moved North to attack Pescia, a small town 1 mile North-West of Pucciarelli. On the right, a coy of 5 Northhamptons (28 Bde 4 br. Div.) with a troop from A Squadron moved up immediately left of the railway running along route 71. Enemy fire was intense. Along about 0900 hrs the enemy loosed a fierce counter attack with tanks. "A" Squadron made first contact with this force when the leading troop knocked out one Panther and damaged another. Before long, A Squadron was able to report — "Another Panther Brewed".

The two forward troops of C Squadron, approaching Pescia by this time, were attacked by three more of these Mk V tanks advancing from Ranciano. At 500 yards C Squadron knocked out one and hit another, which managed to withdraw behind a ridge with the third. This tank, from its vantage point, accounted for one from C Squadron, but was soon finished off with artillery fire. By 1100 Pescia had

been cleared of enemy. Meanwhile, A Squadron had run into more trouble; another of our tanks was brewed by enemy tanks, which soon scattered for cover as 392 Bty lashed out.

C Squadron had pushed on, taking a terrible toll of the enemy, and by 1600 hrs, Ranciano was ours. The third Panther, of the group which attacked them in the morning, was knocked out in the woods, left of the town.

It was the same night, that Lt.-Col. Dunnill, C.O. of the Royal Irish Fuseliers with his I.O., moving forward in a C Squadron tank, disappeared into enemy lines. It was that same action that prompted Lt. Gen. Leese, Commander of the 8th army, to send the following personal message to Lt.-Col. Purves: — "I send to you and the squadron concerned my warmest congratulations on the fine engagements at Pescia and Ranciano, in which you knocked out a number of Panthers and MK IV Tanks. Please congratulate squadrons concerned."

On 28 June, it was proposed that 4 British Division would swing north of Castiglione to cut off the enemy, who was very strong in that area. The enemy fell back along both 4th and 78th Div. fronts. On 29 June, 36 Brigade, supported by A Squadron, pushed forward and Castiglione fell to our troops.

So it was after much stubborn fighting the enemy withdrew from his Trasimeno Line. Using his favourite method of withdrawal, Heidrick ordered his paratroops to launch a strong counter attack late in the afternoon of 28 June, under cover of this 1st Parachute Division broke contact. Forced to fall back on the coastal sector, the enemy was left in a very perilous position — added to the increasing weight of the attack on the Trasimeno Line drove Kesselring to order the inevitable. It was indeed a possibility that the enemy might attempt another defensive position along the lateral road running west from the upper end of the lake. In the Adriatic sector progress had been swift. South of Macerata, the river Chienti had been crossed. However, 5th Army had met with much the same experience as 8th Army. At the time they were in the neighborhood of Roccastrada and Follonica. The French, meanwhile, had thrust slowly over the mountains in the general direction of Siena.

On the 28 June, too, The Regiment, less A Squadron received orders to move to join 4th British Division and again went in support of 28 Infantry Brigade, which was preparing to relieve 10 Infantry Brigade. With "A" Squadron



remaining in support of 36 Brigade at Castiglione, B and C Squadrons moved to Cantagalbina. "B" Squadron moved on to join the 2 Somerset Light Infantry at Vaiano, one mile East of Lago Di Chiusi,

Having terminated that long thirsty fight over desert, sea and mountains from Alamein to Trasimino, 78 Div was slated for a rest and garrison duty in Palestine. The mutual sorrow of our parting from 38 Brigade is reflected in the message to Lt.-Col. Purves from Brig. Scott: — "I feel that before leaving this sector I must write and thank you and all your officers and men for the magnificent co-operation and support you have given us while you were supporting our bde. All the lads in the three Battalions are full of praise for your regiment and there willing and rapid assistance that was such an outstanding feature of the recent battles. I should be very grateful if you will pass on our deep appreciation and our hope that we may again find ourselves placed together. Good Luck to you all!"

#### ON TO FLORENCE

Route 71, running along the west coast of Lake Trasimeno, thence north skirting Cortona and on to Arezzo, marks the eastern boundary of the Chiana Valley. The valley extends westward for some 8 miles and is bounded on the south west corner by Lago Di Chiusi and Lago Di Montepulciano.

It was the intention of 28 Brigade with 11 CAR to push north, on an axis up the centre of the valley through Vaiano, Lopi, Gioiella, Pozzuolo, Petri gnano, Selva.

Opposition had been very slight till mid afternoon on 1 July. After a very clever advance of 16 miles Capt. A. E. Tongs and Lt. O. H. Hopkins of B sqn ran into S P. Anti-tank fire in the area south-east of Selva. Unfortunately, they were both killed in their very brave attempts to thwart the enemy and protect the remainder of B sqn.

Meanwhile, C sqn met heavy opposition about 2 miles south of Selva. That night, the enemy was forced to fall back. On the following morning, B sqn with 2 Sommerset Light Infantry and C sqn with 2 Kings, pushed on. A sqn passed through B sqn at mid morning and followed up C sqn. Pushing on, they reached Ronzano, about 15 miles due south of Arezzo and 4 miles north-east of Foiano D'Chiana. From here the axis of advance was shifted west, to run due north from Foiano, presumably because 6 Armd Div., on the right flank, moving up route 71, was too far

behind, leaving 28 Bde group's flank dangerously exposed.

By noon on the following day, A sqn was forging north, with two troops up, astride the main road from Foiano to Arezzo. Demolitions necessitated tedious progress, and at 1600 hrs, after an advance of only 4½ miles, extremely cruel opposition was encountered. The troop on the left of the road was knocked out complete. The troop on the right was held up by an S. P. gun firing from a well concealed position, 1000 yards to the front. The position was consolidated, with B sqn in the area of Pescaia.

Early in the morning of July 4, C sqn with the 2/4 Hampshires, pushed through A and B sqns, up the main road, striking northwest to Tegoletto on route 73, thence northeast along route 73 to Mugliano. Opposition, consisting only of harassing fire, was light.

On the following day, A sqn passed through B sqn at Dorna, on to Tuori, some 2000 yards north. Subjected to intense shell fire, and because the terrain, by now, was no longer passable to tanks, they were held up at Tuori. C sqn was forced to hold firm at Mugliano because of the exposed right flank. B sqn made a desperate effort to push through A sqn by night. They also found the terrain too difficult for tanks.

The commanding feature was the rough line of a ridge immediately north of Tuori and south of the Arezzo-Florence highway. Once on this feature, our troops, would be able to reduce the pressure facing 6 Armd. Div., moving towards Arezzo. The 6 July found tanks from the three sqns dispersed around Tuori in an all-out attempt to support the infantry onto the ridge. Enemy D. F. was fierce and accurate. The first attempt was frustrated. That evening however, a second and successful attack was launched. The area was consolidated, and by 10 July the regiment had been relieved complete and moved to a rest area just north of Cesa.

Big advances had been made along the whole of the Italian front. The enemy's holding position, north of lake Trasimeno had been successfully broken by troops of the 8 Army. By the 12 July, however, a further stand by the enemy had been encountered, covering the approaches to Ancona, Arezzo and Leghorn. Siena was captured on 13 July by the French expeditionary Corps.

At that time Lt.-Gen. Kirkman, commander of 13 Corps, issued a personal message:—



"In the last two months 13 Corps has not only broken through the fortress position of Cassino, but has advanced some 250 miles, inflicting great losses on the enemy. For the moment the enemy has succeeded in checking our pursuit and we must now push him back again, before he has time further to organize his defenses. It is to our advantage that he should choose to fight here as well as further back on his Gothic line. When we start again we must make a determined effort on whole front to pursue him with such speed and vigour that we shall once more throw him into confusion, inflict heavy losses on him, and prevent him to re-organize south of Florence. All Divisions have fought magnificiently in the past; let us make a similar effort again, and thus together with our comrades on other fronts, move a stage further towards bringing about the enemy's final defeat."

On 15 July, the 11 CAR, along with 28 Bde was ordered to relieve 12 South African Motor Bde of 6 South African Div. By 0800 hrs on 16 July, A sqn with 2 Kings, B sqn with 2 Somerset Light Infantry and C sqn with 2/4 Hampshire had completed the relief, some 15 miles west of Arezzo, due south of Montevarchi. By nightfall, A sqn had supported their friends through Ambra to Cennina, 8 miles south of Montevarchi. Progress was laborously slow since tanks were confined to roads, heavy with mines and demolitions.

The remainder of the Regiment concentrated in Ambra on 17 July. Three days later, after blasting through considerable opposition, B Sqn pushed a troop into Ricasoli, 2000 yds West of Montevarchi. Two other troops from C Sqn with 2/4 Hampshire had pushed up through Montevarchi, thence on to the high ground immediately west of the town.

Lately the enemy had broken contact in several sectors on our front. Fires had been seen and heavy explosions heard in Arezzo. Indications pointed to a planned withdrawal. The withdrawal, however, obviously did not fit in with Kesselring's plan. His stall for time was hoped to last another month in order to give the TODT organization time to complete the Gothic line.

On the evening of 21 July, another relief had been ordered. After a strenuous night drive, the Regiment came to halt 50 miles to the West, near Colle Di Val D'Elsa, a village 15 miles North of Siena; once again in support of 17 Ind Bde.

The enemy had been forced back on

the Arno, as far East as a point half-way between Florence and Pontassieve. All the bridges, West of Florence and in the city itself, had been destroyed, with the exception of Pontevecchio, which was blocked by debris. All reports suggested that 4 Para Div had withdrawn through Florence and was established on the high ground immediately to the North, from which it could cover, with shell and mortar, any attempts to enter the City from the South. The enemy had again reshuffled his troops on our immediate front. The troops covering the withdrawal through Florence were inadequate to hold a heavy drive in all sectors. Therefore a constant regrouping was necessary to cope with a strong drive in any one sector. A timed withdrawal over the Arno had no doubt been organized. Disaster would result should the five Divs., South of Florence, all be forced to move through the town in one leap.

It was the intention of 8 Indian Div to provide a covering screen, facing the Arno, between Signa, 7 miles West of Florence and the army boundry, well to the right of the city. This screen was to cover the regrouping of the II U.S. Corps, concentrating in the rear, prior to attacking across the river Arno, with the main effort in the area of Monte Lupo.

On 3 Aug, the Regiment moved via Certaldo, Castel Fiorentino to the area of Bottinaccio, some 15 miles South-West of Florence. A Sqn joined 1/5 Royal Churka Rifles at Villanova, and B Sqn joined 1 Frontier Force Regiment immediately North of Bottinaccio.

No sooner than the plan had been tied in, the Regiment was rushed off, on 5 Aug, to a concentration area near Montespertoli. The Regiment came under command 1 Canadian Div. and moved at once to support 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade in the valley of the Arno, immediately South of the main lateral, running West from Florence.

"A" Sqn moved with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment to the Western suburbs of the City, south of the Arno. B and C Sqn's were in support of the Seaforths and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in the area of Rinaldi and S. Martino. This action proved to be only a diversionary tactic, so that 1 Canadian Div. might be identified in the Florence sector, prior to being wisped off to the Adriatic sector for the assault on the Gothic Line. On the 8 Aug, 8 Indian Div. relieved 1 Canadian Div, and again the regiment fell in support of 17 Bde. Up to 17 Aug the Regiment was kept very busy indeed; first with 17 Bde and later

with 2 British Inf. Bde of 1 British Inf. Div. Squadrons had the daily task of beating the enemy to the banks of the Arno; — shooting him out of his strong points in S. Colombano, Badia, Fagno, Ugnano, Mantignano. As well, Sqn's were constantly called on to bring harassing fire along the main roads, North of the Arno, running West from Florence. They had too, the responsibility of D.F. along the North bank of the River.

10 Aug. 1944, Lt. H. J. Poupore was killed while making a recce with Capt. N. G. Guthrie and Lt. N. Imeson on the area of Casallina.

Although the Feuhrer had declared Florence an open City, indications were that it was strongly held. Strong points had been constructed in squares, dominating main approaches. Tanks were reported in the northern outskirts. The situation in the City, by Aug 9, was becoming increasingly tense. On the forward slopes that descend to the river from Bellos Guardo, the Poggio Imperiale, Monte Alle Croci and Ricorboli, the Villas and Palazzos were subjected to intermittent shelling. The modern suburbs along the Arno, between Ricorboli and the site of the Ponte Diferro, was a no-man's land. The Boboli Gardens formed an uneasy sanctuary for the refugees crowded into the Pitti Palace; and one corner, near a Renaissance fountain, had become a cemetery for civilians. From the picture gallery, on the second floor of the Palace, one looked down on a tangle of narrow streets between the Ponte Alle Grazie and the Ponte Alla Carraia; — this area was developing into a strange battleground.

At 0500 hrs, on the 17 Aug., a troop from A Sqn crossed the Arno into the Northern City, supporting 1 Loyals, and on the same nights two more troop crossed over in support of 6 Gordons.

Before very long, life, in that part of Florence occupied by us, was rapidly returning to normal; water was being pumped into the town; food was being distributed to over 300,000; the streets were crowded with bicyclists and pedestrians in search of local produce to augment their rations.

The Commandant, in the German part of the city told Red Cross workers, on the 14 Aug., that he found the situation intolerable, (no food for ten days) and was willing to make arrangements to hand over to the British. Then, at last, he allowed women to leave their homes and come into our lines to fetch food for their families.

The enemy's attitude in the town was mainly defensive. 4 Para. Div. was still patrolling aggressively from

its positions on the northern outskirts on the 24 of Aug.

After two days training with 66 Bde. C sqn, on the 25 Aug., moved into north west Florence, in support of that Bde. The action, until the end of the month, consisted of driving the enemy into the hills north of Florence and winking him out of tight corners, such as Fiesole.

## XII — THROUGH THE GOTHIC LINE

By 31 Aug., it was clear that the enemy was carrying out a general withdrawal from 13 Corps sector to the west coast. The intention of 1 Br. Div. was to maintain contact. About that time 13 Corps was placed under command of Fifth American Army. 8th Army had organized its attack on the Gothic line in the Adriatic sector. It was the intention of 13 Corps to pursue the enemy on the Axis: "Star" route, through Pontassieve, Dicomano, Borgo S Lorenzo, and "Arrow" route, through Florence, Borgo S Lorenzo, Marradi, Palazzuolo. 1 Br. Div., with 11 CAR, was pushed up "Star" route. On the left, 2 U. S. Corps was to advance.

The villa studded hills, to the north of Florence, merge into rugged mountains, which extend for some fifteen miles to break abruptly into the valley of the Sieve. The few roads, skirted on one side by sheer cliffs and on the other by a precipitous drop to a narrow gushing mountain stream, wind hazarously through the mountains.

Majors W. J. E. Simmons and W. G. Harrod had worked A and C sqns, in support of 2 Br. Bde., and 66 Br. Bde., for some time north of Florence. On Sep. 5, Major D. H. McIndoe was able to move B sqn some 5 miles north of Florence to L'Olmo, and by 9 Sep., the way in the hills had been cleared for 34 U. S. Div., of 2 U. S. Corps, to get a rolling start up highway 65. Two days later B sqn, with 3 Br. Bde., had reached Borgo S' Lorenzo and the river Sieve.

The valley of the Sieve is very narrow. To the north, the Appenines tower majestically, their loftiness an inspiration to the artist — an ugly obstacle to the soldier. The much flaunted Gothic line structure. The only consolation was seasonal; the enemy too, suffered the numerous chilly rains. Even in this he had advantage; his fortifications, having been built to withstand a long battle, were equipped with shelter.

On the morning of 22 Sep., C sqn came under heavy fire at Crespino Station, about 10 miles south of Marradi. They had fought their way with

3 Br. Bde over the treacherous mountains, through the Gothic line and were approaching the foothills. Their task of opening the route, heavy with demolitions, and of clearing the enemy from the mountains on either side, was indeed difficult. Three days later they had reached Marradi, where they were again held up by demolitions, and a very determined enemy. Lt.-Col. Purves had moved RHQ to Ronta, but due to the utterly inadequate facilities for deployment in the mountains, was forced to remain there for a considerable time and operate with badly stretched communications.

8 Ind. Div., on the right was having an extremely difficult time negotiating the narrow mule trails. The narrowness of these trails did not permit the direct use of tanks for their support. For this reason, C sqn was often called upon to go to their assistance. From its vantage position, so well forward, it was able to give much needed fire support in the area north and west of Marradi. 3 Br. Bde., on the left, needed support as well. Having moved through 66 Bde. at Palazzuola, 3 Bde. was given the task of capturing M. Gamberaldi and M. Grizzano, two formidable features to the north east dominating the front. C sqn, having registered the features, unleashed their fury. Unfortunately the enemy fire on the Marradi demolition was much too intense to permit repairs. Thus the tanks were unable to get forward to give direct support, with the result that the infantry were unable to reach their objective.

By 30 Sep., C sqn had managed to so engage the enemy as to enable repairs. In very short order a troop commanded by Lt. H. Macdonald had pushed north to S. Adriano. This troop was very much alone, with no supporting infantry and both flanks exposed. At one point the enemy attempted to blow the bridge in rear of the troop, thereby cutting it off completely. Since it was impossible to manoeuvre tanks off the road, Lt. Macdonald led a fighting patrol from his troop to thwart the enemy's attempt. Eventually the enemy fire became so intense that Macdonald was obliged to withdraw to Popolano, where he was met by our infantry. From this base the troop supported 17 Ind. Inf. Bde. in several destroying attacks up the valley to S. Martino. Leaving Capt. J. R. Gormley in Marradi, to command the two troops supporting 17 Ind. Bde., the remainder of C sqn moved northwest to Palazzuola, thence supported 1 Br. Div. north to Mercatale. The weather grew steadily worse; the cold rain

seemed almost continuous. The only shelter Lt. J. Cameron could find for his troop was a cemetery. The local priest gathered his flock and descended on Cameron in protest. With simple smiles they withdrew; Cameron too was a Catholic. Squadron headquarters had to evict rats from the slaughter house. The saving grace was that RHQ had moved forward to Marradi. The lines of communications were again convenient.

At Mercatale Lt. W. B. Stewart's troop was having a particularly tough time. They had by-passed the blown bridge by a ford, which had been churned into a mire and was now impassable. Enemy fire on the bridge site was so intense as to prevent any work. Immediately north of Mercatale was the M. Ceco feature, dominating the entire valley. Our only approach to M. Ceco was by frontal assault up a sheer cliff. Time and time again the tanks pounded the feature, and the infantry gained a foothold, only to be beaten off. Finally, on 8 Oct., 1 D.W.R. in spite of the stubborn opposition and fierce counter-attacks, took the objective.

The almost continuous rain and cold, coupled with the very restricted action imposed by the limitations of the valley and the demolitions, created a very uncomfortable situation. The narrow mountain road, supplying two divisions for 60 miles, could withstand only a minimum of traffic, with the result that C sqn could not be relieved. Enemy shelling increased and grew ever more devastating. On 13 Oct., two tanks were knocked out, and on that same night Cpl. C. L. Jones M. M. was killed while endeavouring to replenish the troops supplies. On the 14 Oct., Sqn HQ, with another troop, moved up to Mercatale. With the aid of bulldozers they were able to cross the ford. Another tank was knocked out; — and so it was, compelled as they were to sit in a protective smoke screen, under the nose of the enemy for that long month; daily as the smoke thinned, they belched out at some enemy position.

The weight and persistence of allied attacks toward Bologna caused the enemy to carry out considerable re-disposition of his forces. These, however, were not sufficient to halt our advance, so the concentration of German divisions in the central sector of the Apennine line continued—even at the expense of the Adriatic front, where unfavourable ground and continual rain had enabled the enemy to stabilize his defence and economize his troops holding the line. When 5 Army breached

the Gothic line, and Kesserling tardily appreciated this threat, two divisions were moved from the east to hold the roads leading to Imola and Castel S. Pietro, while one division was moved from the west to block our way north of Firenzuola. By the end of October enemy resistance showed no signs of slackening, and every allied advance provoked an immediate counter-attack, supported by Arty fire as heavy and concentrated as had ever been encountered in the Italian theatre. With the advantage of precipitous terrain, ideal for defence, good lateral communications behind his front line, and excellent gun areas astride the valley roads which led down to the Bologna-Rimini highway, the enemy was able to stabilize his line and fought desperately to hold it at all costs. For the partial success he was achieving, he was paying a heavy price.

### **XIII — "MOUNTE GRANDE TO THE ISLAND"**

About the middle of October, 5 Army commenced concentration of U. S. Corps for an all out drive on Bologna. In order to assist U. S. Corps in its drive, 13 Corps began regrouping. On the 31 Oct., 1 Br. Div. received orders that, on completion of their relief by 8 Ind. Div. and 6 Br. Armd. Div., they would take over the M. Grande sector from 88 U. S. Div. The enemy had moved 90 PG Div. and the bulk of 1 Para. Div. to M. Grande area from the 8 Army front. His attacks against the Grande feature had been up to a Bn. strength. It was expected that these would increase in scope.

1 Br. Div. had completed the relief of 88 U. S. Div., by 6 Nov. Mount Grande, as you may know, was a very important feature some 10 miles south east of the Po Valley communication centre, Bologna. The only roads in the area consisted of jagged mountain mule tracks. Before the rains came the Americans had somehow managed to get tanks forward to this area. These, by now, were all hopelessly stranded, and in most cases even the guns were out of action. Be that as it may, the regiment was still supporting 1 Br. Div., so on the night of 8 Nov., eleven tank crews from A sqn, slipped across the rugged slopes to man the tanks in support of 2 Br. Inf. Bde.

Two days later, B sqn sent 4 tank crews to man more tanks at S. Clemente, 3000 yds due south of M. Grande. These tanks were covering an important road block in support of 66 Br. Bde. The front, due largely to the weather, had settled down to a period of patrol

and Arty activity. The enemy's chief preoccupation was getting information about our troops and putting his own defenses in order. His probable intentions were summed up by a Capt. Brenning who, according to P. J. made the following speech:—

"The situation at the present time is such that the indefinite defense of the Po Valley cannot and is not being planned, because of the enormous material superiority of the enemy. It is up to you men to keep the enemy from entering the valley for as long as is humanly possible. Germany depends on it for food and other supplies for the coming winter and as much must be got out as possible. Victory or defeat for us depends largely on how long we are able to keep the enemy from overrunning this highly important centre."

The 9 Nov. saw little change on any front; forward troops of 8 Army had been held on the edge of Forlì airfield, but the enemy broke contact that night. On our front the Parachutists still showed no signs of exceptional life.

C sqn, having no further purpose in the Palazzuolo sector, moved south across the mountains to a regimental area at Ronta on the 14 of Nov. On the following night B sqn moved 8 tanks, in a blinding icy rain, into the Grande sector. These tanks were to be used in an artillery role under command of the C. R. A. Meanwhile 8 Army attacked west of Forlì with considerable success. As anticipated, the enemy was prepared to fall back, under pressure, to the line of the Northern Montone. A most peculiar situation—that Mount Grande business! However, it provided one of the finest possible illustrations of the important morale effect tank people have always had on the infantry. Two of the tanks, A sqn crews took over, were at Vezzola on the Mount Calderare feature. Neither tank was operational. They were under enemy observation, and consequently came in for continual mortar and machine gun fire. It was absolutely necessary for the crews to live entirely in their tanks. Six hundred yds to the rear, were two more tanks and three tank destroyers, partly hidden in a group of houses, called "tank house," although none of these could move, the guns could be fired. It was in "tank house" that Capt. Cole set up A sqn fwd H. Q. On the forward slope of Mount Grande, about 300 yds in rear of tank house, were two more tanks, not operational. Here too, because of the constant enemy shell and mortar fire, the crews had to remain



inside the tanks continually. The other two tanks were on their sides at Farneto. It was in the cold dark of every third night, when the mule trains brought the rations over the thin mountain trails, that tank crews rotated about the circle to get their only possible diversion—so it was a day in and day out.

The situation on the Divisional front can best be summed up by the account of a highly successful patrol, on the night of 9/10 December, in the area east and south of Casa Del Broglio, where 5 enemy were killed and 4 taken P. W. The encounter started when our troops were challenged by a sentry and attacked by two sections of enemy, supported by 2 MMG's and 2 Mortars. The ensuing fight cost the enemy 4 in killed and wounded. As our patrol was disengaging, an enemy patrol consisting of a Cpl. and 5 men came up from a gully and attacked our troops from the rear. From them 5 P. W. were taken, one of whom died shortly afterwards. All the enemy engaged were paratroops. On the following night, as if nettled by our success, the enemy, in approximately one platoon strength, raided one of our forward positions in a typical paratroop style. The performance was carried out with a quick, silent approach and accompanied by a clash of artillery and mortars.

There was still no real sign that any large scale enterprise was afoot, but there was plenty to indicate that the paratroops had not had their fill of local attacks and raids. It was evident that Grande would, without question, enormously increase the security of the enemy's right flank as he pivoted back, under pressure of 8 Army and 13 Corps' attacks, on to successive river lines. To this end Counter Bty. figures showed Grande the recipient of 650 shells and 850 mortars and nebelwerfer bombs in the prelude attack on Cevere.

The only real change on the Div. front in nearly two months was the snow, and this, in spite of the inconvenience it brought, was a welcome relaxation for the A sqn people. Christmas day found them still sitting in their tanks on bleak old Grande, taking their regular machine gun rakings and mortar stonks. B sqn too was still going strong under slightly better conditions. During their stay they had been able to do a tremendous amount of firing, and, though it was indirect, two enemy "Brew-ups" were confirmed—they were busy; that was all they needed to keep happy.

For the more fortunate of the Reg-

iment, Christmas 1944 will long be remembered for its excellent food and excellent fellowship.

At the begining of January there was still no major development on the Italian front, nor anything definite to indicate what was in store. But, although the front had remained quiet, there had not been lacking signs, which, taken together, suggested something was afoot. These included more daylight movement than usual, as well as the registration of points widely dispersed round the front, and included the old favorites Cerere and Grande.

B sqn had moved more tanks to the Farneto ridge to counter any enemy attack on the divisional north sector, and some to counter any threat to C. Nuova, Cerere and Grande. C sqn had relieved A sqn on Grande by the end of the first week in January, only to be greeted by a marked increase in shelling.

On the left, the enemy had made a sudden thrust down the Serchio Valley, followed by a quick withdrawal. By then, however, the heavy snow had restricted all movement. Before very long C sqn was relieved by 755 U. S. tank Bn.

Less than a month later the entire regiment was enjoying the Adriatic sun on the beaches at Porto S. Giorgio, a small fishing village, 60 miles north of Pescara. This transplanting, to under command 8 Army again, give rise to liberal conjecture, but it wasn't until the regiment had moved back across the country to touch down at a transit camp near Leghorn, that anyone knew they should soon leave Italy and their old friends from 13 Corps and 8 Army—and the enemy, sitting on his line.

"Gold Flake" was the name given to the operation that moved an entire Corps from the Italian theatre to N. W. Europe. Security was the keyword, as the regiment loaded on LST's at Leghorn, off-loaded at Marseille, and thence throughout that long march northward to Mouscron, where it arrived complete on 15 March.

Mouscron is a typical little Belgium town, just inside the French-Belgium border, about 20 miles north of Lille. The overwhelming welcome the lads received there was indeed a change from anything they had experienced during the long months in Italy. It was well worth the tedious journey that had brought them so far from the Appenines.

Field Marshall Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, C in C 21 Army Group, sent the following message:—

"I want to send a personal message

of warm greeting and welcome to all troops that are coming to join me from Italy and the Mediterranean theatre. I am delighted to think that I shall meet again many old friends.

I left the Eighth Army in Italy in December 1943, and ever since then I have watched your operations with great admiration. And, while you have been doing your stuff in Italy, we on this front, have pushed the Germans back into their own country; we now fight on German soil.

And what is the situation today? The operations of the Allies on all fronts has brought the German war to its final stages. Our great Russian Allies are thrusting into Germany from the East, while, in the West, we have breached the Siegfried Line in many places and are lining up on the Rhine. Germany is ringed around and at bay, and the final round is just starting. This round will continue until final and complete victory has been won, and that day cannot be too far off.

I shall take an early opportunity of paying you a visit so that we can meet each other again.

Signed—B. L. Montgomery

On 18 March Field Marshall Montgomery spoke to all the officers and Warrant officers in Ypres, and inspected the men of the Regiment, who were lined along the roads which he passed.

The following extracts from the war diary indicate few idle moments for January, February and March.

#### JANUARY

17 Jan.—C sqn relieved complete by 755 U. S. Tank Bn. 11 CAR reverts from command 1 Br. Div. to 1 C. A. B.

23 Jan.—Unit received warning order to move to Adriatic coast U/C 8 Army

24 Jan.—Two B sqn tanks, using grousers, returned from gun lines.

25 Jan.—Remaining B sqn tanks returned from gun lines.

31 Jan.—Reg'tl Recce party left for Porto S. Giorgio.

#### FEBRUARY

9 Feb.—Regiment had arrived in Porto S. Giorgio.

21 Feb.—"Gold Flake." A sqn tanks moved from Porto S. Giorgio to entrench at Jesi.

26 Feb.—Regiment completely clear of Porto S. Giorgio.

28 Feb.—Regiment complete in Harrod's camp, near Leghorn.

#### MARCH

2 Mar.—Tanks commenced loading on LST's at Leghorn.

6 Mar.—Unit complete in Marseille.

10 Mar.—First tank train arrived at

Mouscron.

15 Mar.—Unit complete in Mouscron.

18 Mar.—All Officers and W. O's to Ypres for address by Field Marshall Montgomery.

20 Mar.—Regiment informed to come U/C 49 Br. (W R) Div., probable move 22 March to Nijmegen.

21 Mar.—C. O. and sqn cmdrs to 1 Cdn. Corps HQ area Nijmegen.

Regiment up to strength on new establishment with new equipment.

23 Mar.—Regiment commenced move to Lent, small town across Waal from Nijmegen.

24 Mar.—C sqn tanks arrived Nijmegen, moved north across Waal to Resen in support 147 Br. Bde.

25 Mar.—B sqn tanks arrived Nijmegen, moved to Andelst.

26 Mar.—A sqn tanks arrived Nijmegen, moved to Lent.

28 Mar.—Operation order—"Op. Destroyer." B sqn harassing fire on Randwijk.

30 Mar.—sqns marrying up and trig with Bde. of 49 Br. (W. R.) Div. A & C sqns, 147 Bde., B sqn., 146 Bde.

#### XIV NORTH WEST EUROPE.

Extract from Personal message from C. in C. 21 Army Gp. on the eve of the Rhine crossings:—

"In the West, the enemy has lost the Rhineland and with it the flower of at least four armies—the Parachute army, fifth Panzer army, and Seventh army: the First army further to the south, is now being added to the list."

In the Rineland Battles the enemy has lost about 150,000 prisoners, and there are many more to come; his total casualties amount to about 250,000 since 8th February.

In the East, the enemy has lost all Pomerania east of the Oder, an area as large as the Rhineland; and three more German armies have been routed. The Russian armies are within about 35 miles from Berlin.

Overhead the Allied Airforces are pounding Germany day and night. It will be interesting to see how much longer the Germans can stand it.

The enemy has in fact been driven into a corner, and he cannot escape. Events are moving rapidly. The complete and decisive defeat of the Germans is certain.

21 Army Group will now cross the Rhine."

Thus on the 24 March, following the good news of the previous night that Paton's Army had obtained a crossing over the Rhine—even greater news—the epic battle, long expected, had begun in the North, and five further

bridgeheads had been obtained.

In the Remagen bridgehead the Americans had continued to advance East. Patton already had a class 40 bridge at Oppenheim; Frankfurt would be surprised before long.

Army Gp. H., opposing 1st Cdn Army, from its inception had offered the keenest competition, and there had never been a time in which the opposing command seemed to be affected by the uselessness of it all. The whole battle had been fought by the enemy, sternly and skillfully.

The northern part of the Western front, being merely all holding flank, had till that day, been the only point of the German front which had been maintained unbroken since Nov. Between Arnhem and Duisburg he had faced the fiercest onslaughts. The bad weather had receded with the floods. To the South five armies had dissolved before the sweet revenge of the Americans. Finally the Rhine had been crossed at seven places — Remagen, South of Maintz and five places between Emmerich and Dinslaken. His fears had been conformed.

Against this background the purposes of holding up on the Maas and Waal and the Dutch population down behind it, appeared no longer to justify the resources used. There was still tied up in Holland the best part of 100,000 troops with their weapons. In essence, they were used to protect the despatch of about ten V Weapons daily to London. Nevertheless, he still thought there was money in his V-offensive from the Hague and Rotterdam and in the naval bases along the West coast and in the Dutch Islands. Just as important in his eyes was the fact that occupation of the established line in Holland was tying down forces which might otherwise effect the course of the battle in Germany. Furthermore, another month of work was strengthening the defences along the IJssel line. These together with his unwillingness to give up ground without a fight, for prestige reasons, probably represented the main considerations governing enemy policy in Holland.

What must have been a keen ambition among the troops of 49 Br. (W.R.) Div., who, on and off, had for four months watched a front changed only by all the extreme elements of Mother Nature except heat, was to be fulfilled.

At first light on the 2 Apr "C" sqn moved from its harbour at Ressen to support 147 Bde.

The intention of 49 Br. Div., supported by 11 C.A.R., was to destroy all the enemy on the Eastern Tip of the Island, between Nijmegen and Arnhem.

Moving East through Bommel to Haaldren, two troops u/c Lts. J. Cameron and W. B. Stewart, held up to await the "go" sign from the D.W.R.

The main enemy defence in the sector was South along Broek Straat. For this, the Rijn Wetering provided an excellent water barrier. It was here that the D.W.R. first encountered difficulty. The coy, that was to cross the Wetering and attack the houses 1500 yds due east of Haalderen, ran into very heavy opposition. The houses were indeed defended, and for a time the situation was serious.

This was the "go" sign for Lt. Cameron, who now manoeuvred his troop, accompanied by a bridging tank, across the irrigation ditches to a position on the Wetering. While the troop blasted the houses, the bridging tank was positioned. Before many minutes the troop was pounding across the bridge, and in very short order the enemy in the area were entirely subdued.

With the enemy so caught in the thrust of his position, it was little trouble for the D. W. R. to clear Kommerdijk, Gent-en-Kapel, and all the area South to the Waal.

By midday the second troop had moved forward to assist in mopping up. Well over 100 PW streamed from the area Gent, Degeer, Flieren.

The D.W.R. having consolidated East of the enemy's defence line with the two troops of "C" sqn, two other troops under command of Lts. MacDonald and Wotton advanced in support of the support of the Royal Scots. Clearing the network of roads, immediately North of Gent-en-Kapel, they swung North to consolidate along de Dyke road, thus cutting off the entire Eastern tip of the Island.

Meanwhile, "A" sqn, in support of the Leicesters, was moving East from Lent, along the Dyke road, following the Waal to Hulhuizen. Encountering only withering resistance, they swung North to take Doornenburg.

Before long the entire Eastern tip of the Island was reported clear of the enemy.

At approx 1600 hrs, a troop from "B" sqn, commanded by Lt. J. Richardson, moved through C sqn and the Royal Scots to support the Lincolns clearing Angeren. Continuing North, they captured Huissen and cleared all the enemy between.

On the following day another troop from "B" sqn, commanded by Lt. J. Black, moved from Bommel in the early grey morning, and having supported the Hallams to clear Zand, swung North West to Rijkerswaard.

Sweeping up some P.W. in the area of Kronenburg, they advanced on to take

Elden by 1600 hrs.

Moving into position along the Dyke North West of Elden on the 4 April, they blasted the remnants of the enemy from the Eastern tip of the Island, in the area of Praets.

This was the prelude to the final assault across the river IJssel to capture Arnhem, which, coincident with the attack by 1 Cdn. Div. West across the IJssel at Zutphen, came on the 13 of April.

Taking advantage of the rapid Northward advance by 2 Cdn Corps from its bridgehead at Emmerich, 49 Br Div with 11 CAR crossed the Rhine to Babberik on the 11 April.

The intention of "Op. Anger" was for 49 Br. Div, supported by 11 CAR, to force a crossing of the IJssel and secure Arnhem as a preliminary to further offensive operations against the enemy in West Holland.

As darkness came on the night of 12 April, so began the final step of placing Arnhem behind.

After a full day of typhoon attacks, the evening produced a final nightcap with one of the most devastating bombardments by the Arty., that the enemy had ever faced. A nightcap that did little to raise the spirits of those who were on the receiving end.

At approx 2315 hrs, the leading Bn. touched down on the far bank. By 0330 hrs., on the morning of 13th, another Bn was being passed through.

The first Bn to cross was the Essex, from 56 Bde, supported by a troop from "A" sqn, commanded by Lt. C. M. Sullivan. Their task of securing a limited bridgehead in the Southernmost sector of the town was accomplished in remarkable order.

The acting C.O. of 11 CAR, Major McLean crossed in the Buffalo of 146 Bde Command Gp. at approximately 0400 hrs.

The task, allotted to 146 Bde., supported by "C" sqn, was to pass through 56 Bde and enlarge the bridgehead to the North. The Lincolns started the advance but ran into extremely difficult circumstances at the factory immediately north of the railway junction in the south of the town.

This structure provided such an excellent fortress position, that by 1000 hrs. it was still holding the advance. It was then that the first two troops from "C" sqn, commanded by Lts. S. Wotton and H. McDonald, crossed the river. Lt. Wotton went on forward to support the Lincoln. The intention was now to drive East, North of the factory, thereby continuing the advance, cutting off the factory and subsequently mopping it up.

Fighting through the built-up area

was slow, owing to the necessity of thoroughly clearing the M.G. and snipers positions from the many houses.

Lt. Wotton managed to make his way North of the factory but was unable to strike East because of an Anti-Tank gun covering the corner. — Lt. McDonald was then ordered forward. By-passing Wottons tp, he made a lightning move across the corner to knock out the gun, thus opening the way for the advance. Employing by-pass and block tactics McDonald's troop had soon cleared well to the East of the factory, where he was obliged to hold firm, while the Infantry mopped up the factory area. The situation was now immensely relieved, and by 1600 hrs the remainder of "C" sqn. had crossed into the town.

Lt. W. B. Stewart immediately went forward to contact the Hallams, who were, by this time, organizing an attack through the North of the town.

It was dusk when the Hallams set out, supported by the two troops, commanded by Lts. Stewart and McDonald, and before darkness they had forced their way to the northern fringe of the town.

The thirteenth had indeed been a bad day for the enemy, who had lost an untold number in dead, wounded and P.W. As well, our bridgehead was now secure.

Early the following morning, Lt. J. Cameron supported the KOYLI through the central sector of the town to the Northern outskirts, where his troop spent the day taking a reckless toll of the enemy. The Hun was completely confused, and in spite of his numbers and equipment, which included unbelievable numbers of Bazookas and Anti-Tank Guns, he was unable to do anything but give up.

At the same time Lt. McDonald, having rejoined the Lincolns was forging his way to the Dyke in the South Eastern edge of the town. That day alone his troop accounted for some 200 P.W.

Meanwhile "A" and "B" Sqns., having crossed into Arnhem complete, at first light, were having a thoroughly enjoyable time shooting Germans.

"B" Sqn had moved to support the Hallams in clearing the North Eastern outskirts of the town, thereby making way for the 5 Cdn Arm'd Div to exploit North.

"A" Sqn., in support of 147 Bde., worked through the centre of the town to clear and consolidate to the West and North-West.

Lt. Nixon with the Leicesters and Lt. W. Hunnisett with the Royal Scots blasted their way to the Western fringes, while Lt. R. Hastings, in support of the D.W.R., moved North West past the lakes. Immediately North of the town three light tanks crossed Lt. Hastings



path. The first was brewed up; the second was knocked out, and the third gave up.

Having established 147 Bde on it objective by dusk, "A" sqn. returned to the centre of the town.

Apart from further mopping up in the North Eastern Sector, and the subsequent silencing of two annoying flak guns by Lt. McDonalds troop, the 15th was spent in preparation for exploitation.

The following day, supported by 146 Bde, the Regiment, spearheaded by "A" Sqn, dashed some 20 miles Eastward to take Dieren. It was along the Apeldoornsche canal. Unfortunately, however, the enemy had taken out for the North, and only a scattered remnant remained for the Regiment's delight.

Rushing back to Arnhem that same night, "A" and "C" Sqns again tied in with 147 Bde. Brig. Woods and Maj. C. M. McLean laid on a plan. First light of the 17 April found them on their way again; "A" sqn with the D.W.R. and "C" sqn with the Leicesters: this time to clear the area South of the Ede-Arnhem highway to the Neder Rijn, and to assist in the capture of Ede, Bennekom and Wageningen.

It was a highly successful effort, and with the task completed they consolidated on that line as far North of Lunteren.

For the next week "A" and "C" sqn were mainly concerned with daily fighting patrols sent out to beat up any enemy within 10 miles to the West.

"B" sqn, in support of 49 Div. Recce Regt, undertook to clean up the area west of the river IJssel and North of the line Deventer-Apeldoorn. Moving full out, they completed the 100 mile stretch to the North in one day.

To clear the start line for the proposed attack on Utrecht, "C" sqn., on the 24th April, supported the Leicesters in a successful attack on Renswoude some 10 miles West of Lunteren. The following morning a large concentration of enemy in an attempted spoiling attack on Renswoude was sent running whence it came.

## XV "FINIS"

In Northern Europe the British and Russian armies were rapidly converging. By the end of April the Russians had a fresh bridgehead over the Elbe: the British were striking on towards the Baltic. The Russians in Berlin were a mile from the fortified Tiergarten. Two United States armies had converged on Munich, birthplace of the Nazi movement.

Himmler, presumably in his capacity as GOC in C of the broken and beaten home army, had seen Swedish Count Bernadotte, the Vice-Chairman of the

Swedish Red Cross, on 21 April, and as a last dig at inter-allied relations, made a verbal bid for unconditional surrender to Britain and the U.S.

The Dutch SS on our front seemed little affected by the news of Himmler's offer, in fact they knew nothing of it. They were in a precarious position, and probably for that reason the news had been kept from them.

Elsewhere on the front, to the north of Amersfoort, the German troops, having presumably taken Himmler's offer as accepted, rejoiced and celebrated accordingly. In Utrecht civilians hung out orange flags, while the Germans stood about and took no action.

What the reaction to all this would be, now that the request for surrender had been rejected — remained to be seen —

In the meantime, while the political talks were carried on, we remained fully aware of the enemy on our front. — the time might come when they would have to be destroyed.

Finally at 2030 hrs. on the 4th May, the B.B.C., from official sources, announced the unconditional surrender of the German forces in North West Germany, Holland and Denmark and Friesian Islands, effective 0800 hrs., 5 May 1945.

The following message was received on 5 May giving the terms of the Instrument of surrender signed by the C-in-C, 21 Army Group.

First. The German command agrees to the surrender of all German forces in Holland, in N. W. Germany including the Friesian Islands and Heligoland and all other Islands in Schleswig Holstein and in Denmark to the C-in-C 21 Army Gp. These forces to lay down their arms and to surrender unconditionally.

Second. All hostilities on land on sea or in the air by German forces in the above areas to cease at 0800 hrs D. B. S. T. Sat. 5 May 1945.

Third. The German command to carry out at once and without argument or command all further orders that will be issued by the allied powers on any subject. Disobedience of orders or failure to comply with them will be regarded as a breach of these surrender terms and will be dealt with by the allied powers in accordance with the accepted laws and usages of War.

Fifth. This instrument of surrender is independent of and without prejudice to and will be superseded by any general instrument of surrender imposed by or on behalf of the Allied Powers and applicable to Germany and the armed forces as a whole.

The regiment accepted the end, with no outward display of enthusiasm.